MEREDITH

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OWEN MEREDITH

THE

POETICAL WORKS

OF

OWEN MEREDITH

(ROBERT, LORD LYTTON)

LUCILE, THE APPLE OF LIFE, THE WANDERER,
CLYTEMNESTRA, ETC., ETC.

Household Edition

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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LUCILE.

Dedication.

TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavored to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labor which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement and doubt my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honored name with which I thus seek to associate it: nor yet, because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honored by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts, — feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own, — lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighboring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed task-work of maturer years; less confident indeed of your approval, but not less confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

PART I.

CANTO I.

I.

Letter from the COMTESSE DE NEVERS *to* LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

"I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I am told
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old,
So long since you may have forgotten it now,
(When we parted as friends, soon mere strangers to grow,)
Your last words recorded a pledge — what you will —
A promise — the time is now come to fulfil.
The letters I ask you, my lord, to return,

I desire to receive from your hand. You discern
My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.
The distance to Luchon is short. I remain
A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, perchance,
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance
Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your place
At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.
I desire nothing more, and I trust you will feel
I desire nothing much.
"Your friend always,
"LUCILE."

II.

Now in May Fair, of course, — in the fair month of May, —
When life is abundant, and busy, and gay:
When the markets of London are noisy about
Young ladies, and strawberries, — "only just out":
Fresh strawberries sold under all the house-eaves,
And young ladies on sale for the strawberry leaves:
When cards, invitations, and three-cornered notes
Fly about like white butterflies, — gay little motes
In the sunbeam of Fashion; and even Blue Books
Take a heavy-winged flight, and grow busy as rooks;
And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,
Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,
Those lots which so often decide if our day
Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay),
Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or other
Than Cadmus himself put together, to bother
The heads of Hellenes; — I say, in the season
Of Fair May, in May Fair, there can be no reason
Why, when quietly munching your dry-toast and butter,
Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter
At the sight of a neat little letter, addressed
In a woman's handwriting, containing, half guessed,
An odor of violets faint as the Spring,
And coquettishly sealed with a small signet-ring.
But in Autumn, the season of sombre reflection,
When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection;
Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,
Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees,
Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,
A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,
A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,
Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,
The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,
And a letter may alter the plans we arranged
Over-night, for the slaughter of Time, — a wild beast,
Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,
Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,
And more mischievous, too, than the lynx or the bear.

III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already
Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,
Lord Alfred was startled.
The month is September;
Time, morning; the scene at Bigorre;
(pray remember
These facts, gentle reader, because I intend
To fling all the unities by at the end.)
He walked to the window. The morning was chill:

The brown woods were crisped in the cold on the hill:
The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind;
And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his mind,
Rose, and eddied around and around, as though teasing
Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleasing:
And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,
To himself more than once (vexed in soul) sighed
. . . . . "Confound it!"

IV.

What the thoughts were which led to this bad interjection,
Sir, or Madam, I leave to your future detection ;
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool !

LORD ALFRED.

Who ?

JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do ;
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,
To travel about with a woman in love, —
Unless she 's in love with himself.

ALFRED.

Indeed ! why
Are you here then, dear Jack ?

JOHN.

Can't you guess it ?

ALFRED.

Not I.

JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that 's better to do.
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by myself.
That perverse, imperturbable, golden-haired elf —
Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me
Such a dance through these hills —

ALFRED.

Who, Matilda ?

JOHN.

Yes ! she,
Of course ! who but she could contrive so to keep
One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four ?

ALFRED.

What 's the matter ?

JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more
I consider about it, the more it demands
An attention it does not deserve ; and expands
Beyond the dimensions which even crinoline,
When possessed by a fair face and saucy Eighteen,
Is entitled to take in this very small star,
Already too crowded, as *I* think, by far.
You read Malthus and Sadler ?

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

To what use,
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous abuse
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space
In this world ? Mars, Apollo, Virorum ! the case
Wholly passes my patience.

ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

JOHN.

Yours, Alfred ?

ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide.

JOHN (*reading the letter*).

" *I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told*
You are going to marry Miss Darcy. Of old — "
What is this ?

ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you 'll know.

JOHN (*continues reading*).

" *When we parted, your last words recorded a vow —*
What you will " . . . .

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,
Of adventures and violets. Was it your hair
You promised a lock of?

ALFRED.

Read on. You'll discern.

JOHN (*continues*).

"*Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return.*" . . .
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse than I guessed;
I have my misgivings —

ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,
And advise.

JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I? . . .
(*Continues.*)
"*Miss Darcy, perchance,*
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance
Of her courtship." . . .
Egad! a romance, for my part,
I'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

ALFRED.

Continue!

JOHN (*reading*).

"*And spare you one day from your place*
At her feet." . . .
Pray forgive me the passing grimace.
I wish you had MY place!
(*Reads.*)
"*I trust you will feel*
I desire nothing much. Your friend" . . .
Bless me! "*Lucile*"?
The Comtesse de Nevers?

ALFRED.

Yes.

JOHN.

What will you do?

ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

JOHN.

You can't go.

ALFRED.

I must.

JOHN.

And Matilda?

ALFRED.

O, that
You must manage!

JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.
In an hour the horses will be at the door,
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before
I have finished my breakfast, of course I receive
A message for "*dear Cousin John!*" . . .
I must leave
At the jeweller's the bracelet which *you* broke last night;
I must call for the music. "Dear Alfred is right:
The black shawl looks best: *will* I change it? Of course
I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.
Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows what;
Will I see the dog-doctor?" Hang Beau! I will *not*.

ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

JOHN.

It is.

ALFRED.

Very well,
You must think —

JOHN.

What excuse will you make, though?

ALFRED.

O, tell
Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits, Jack! . . . the deuce!
Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's use?
Excuses are clothes which, when asked unawares,
Good Breeding to naked Necessity spares.
You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

JOHN.

My dear fellow!
Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.

ALFRED.

You joke.

JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.
Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,
Before I extinguish forever the fire
Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light
Hope whispered her first fairy tales, to excite
The last spark, till it rise, and fade far in that dawn
Of my days where the twilights of life were first drawn
By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love:
In short, from the dead Past the grave-stone to move;
Of the years long departed forever to take
One last look, one final farewell; to awake
The Heroic of youth from the Hades of joy,
And once more be, though but for an hour, Jack — a boy!

JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

ALFRED.

No! were it but
To make sure that the Past from the Future is shut,
It were worth the step back. Do you think we should live
With the living so lightly, and learn to survive
That wild moment in which to the grave and its gloom
We consigned our heart's best, if the doors of the tomb
Were not locked with a key which Fate keeps for our sake?
If the dead could return, or the corpses awake?

JOHN.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up
A filled guest from the banquet, and drains off his cup,
Sees the last lamp extinguished with cheerfulness, goes
Well contented to bed, and enjoys its repose.
But he who hath supped at the tables of kings,
And yet starved in the sight of luxurious things;
Who hath watched the wine flow, by himself but half tasted,
Heard the music, and yet missed the tune; who hath wasted
One part of life's grand possibilities; — friend,
That man will bear with him, be sure, to the end,
A blighted experience, a rancor within:
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

JOHN.

I see you remember the cynical story
Of that wicked old piece of Experience, — a hoary
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his bed
(Knowing well the unprincipled life he had led,
And observing, with no small amount of surprise,
Resignation and calm in the old sinner's eyes)
Asked if he had nothing that weighed on his mind:
"Well, . . . no," . . . says Lothario, "I think not. I find
On reviewing my life, which in most things was pleasant,
I never neglected, when once it was present,
An occasion of pleasing myself. On the whole,
I have naught to regret"; . . . and so, smiling, his soul
Took its flight from this world.

ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,
Which is best?

JOHN.

Why, Regret.

ALFRED.

No; Remorse, Jack, of course;
For the one is related, be sure, to the other.

Regret is a spiteful old maid ; but her brother,
Remorse, though a widower certainly, yet
Has been wed to young Pleasure. Dear Jack, hang Regret !

JOHN.

Bref ! you mean, then, to go ?

ALFRED.

Bref ! I do.

JOHN.

One word . . . stay !
Are you really in love with Matilda ?

ALFRED.

Love, eh ?
What a question ! Of course.

JOHN.

Were you really in love
With Madame de Nevers ?

ALFRED.

What ; Lucile ? No, by Jove,
Never *really*.

JOHN.

She 's pretty ?

ALFRED.

Decidedly so.
At least, so she was, some ten summers ago.
As soft and as sallow as Autumn, — with hair
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which the air
Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone
Through a vineyard, from beams of a slow-setting sun.
Eyes — the wistful gazelle's ; the fine foot of a fairy ;
And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, — white and airy ;
A voice soft and sweet as a tune that one knows.
Something in her there was, set you thinking of those
Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . . that hectic and deep
Brief twilight in which southern suns fall asleep.

JOHN.

Coquette ?

ALFRED.

Not at all. 'T was her own fault. Not she !
I had loved her the better, had she less loved me.
The heart of a man 's like that delicate weed
Which requires to be trampled on, boldly indeed,
Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish to extract.
'T is a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

JOHN.

Women change so.

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,
I believe that, last year, the Comtesse de Nevers *
Was at Baden the rage, — held an absolute court
Of devoted adorers, and really made sport
Of her subjects.

ALFRED.

Indeed !

JOHN.

When she broke off with you
Her engagement, her heart did not break with it ?

ALFRED.

Pooh !

---

* O Shakespeare ! how couldst thou ask "What 's in a name ?"
'T is the devil 's in it when a bard has to frame
English rhymes for alliance with names that are French ;
And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that I trench
All too far on that license which critics refuse,
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up Muse.
Yet, though faulty the union, in many a line,
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French heroine,
Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,
Your forgiveness for this pair the author invites,
Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.

Pray would you have had her dress always in black,
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?
Besides, 't was my fault the engagement was broken.

JOHN.

Most likely. How was it?

ALFRED.

The tale is soon spoken.
She bored me. I showed it. She saw it. What next?
She reproached. I retorted. Of course she was vexed.
I was vexed that she was so. She sulked. So did I.
If I asked her to sing, she looked ready to cry.
I was contrite, submissive. She softened. I hardened.
At noon I was banished. At eve I was pardoned.
She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.
I swore she talked nonsense. She sobbed I talked treason.
In short, my dear fellow, 't was time, as you see,
Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'T was she
By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.
She released me. I lingered. I lingered, she thought,
With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,
The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,
And declare myself uncomprehended. And so
We parted. The rest of the story you know.

JOHN.

No, indeed.

ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not
Continue to meet, as before, in one spot.
You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdinando
Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.
I think that I acted exceedingly well,
Considering the time when this rupture befell,
For Paris was charming just then. It deranged
All my plans for the winter. I asked to be changed, —
Wrote for Naples, then vacant, — obtained it, — and so
Joined my new post at once; but scarce reached it, when lo!
My first news from Paris informs me Lucile
Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.
I fly back. I find her recovered, but yet
Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret;
I ask to renew the engagement.

JOHN.

And she?

ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be
Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing!
We each keep our letters . . . a portrait . . . a ring . . .
With a pledge to return them whenever the one
Or the other shall call for them back.

JOHN.

Pray go on.

ALFRED.

My story is finished. Of course I enjoin
On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin
To supply the grim deficit found in our days,
When Love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She obeys.
She goes out in the world; takes to dancing once more, —
A pleasure she rarely indulged in before.
I go back to my post, and collect (I must own
'T is a taste I had never before, my dear John)
Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigh-ho! now, Jack,
You know all.

JOHN (*after a pause*).

You are really resolved to go back?

ALFRED.

Eh, where?

JOHN.

To that worst of all places, — the past.
You remember Lot's wife?

ALFRED.

'T was a promise when last
We parted. My honor is pledged to it.

JOHN.

Well,
What is it you wish me to do?

ALFRED.

You must tell
Matilda, I meant to have called — to leave word —
To explain — but the time was so pressing —

JOHN.

My lord,
Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

ALFRED.

You wish then to break off my marriage?

JOHN.

No, no!
But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take
These letters.

ALFRED.

Not see? would you have me, then, break
A promise my honor is pledged to?

JOHN (*humming*).

"*Off, off,*
And away! said the stranger" . . .

ALFRED.

O, good! O, you scoff!

JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

ALFRED.

At all things!

JOHN.

Indeed?

ALFRED.

Yes; I see that your heart is as dry as a reed:
That the dew of your youth is rubbed off you: I see
You have no feeling left in you, even for me!
At honor you jest; you are cold as a stone
To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have none;
You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight
About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight
Of such callous indifference, who could be calm?
I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm
That is left me in Gilead you'll turn into gall.
Heartless, cold, unconcerned . . .

JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all?
Well, then, listen to me! I presume when you made
Up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy, you weighed
All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,
Ere you finally settled the point. What remains
But to stick to your choice? You want money: 't is here.
A settled position: 't is yours. A career:
You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,
Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch
To be running away, on the eve of all this,
To a woman whom never for once did you miss
All these years since you left her? Who knows what may hap?
This letter — to *me* — is a palpable trap.
The woman has changed since you knew her. Perchance
She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.
When women begin to feel youth and their beauty
Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty
To let nothing else slip away unsecured
Which these, while they lasted, might once have procured.

Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,
I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish lingers
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover
To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover
What truth could not keep. 'T were a vengeance, no doubt —
A triumph; — but why must *you* bring it about?
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dreamed!

ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack.
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough
To make your betrothed break off all in a huff.
Three days, do you say? But in three days who knows
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,
The one most abundantly furnished and found us,
And which, for that reason, we least care about,
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.
But advice, when 't is sought from a friend (though civility
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to indorse.
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack
A slender valise (the one small condescension
Which his final remonstrance obtained), whose dimension
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he
Shook hands with his friend and returned to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turned,
Ere he locked up and quitted his chamber, discerned
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright
In what Virgil has called "Youth's purpureal light"
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).
He sighed as he looked at her. Did he regret her?
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,
With their little impertinent look of surprise,
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow, —
I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour

Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky-Way
Could turn into a woman, 't would look, I dare say,
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh
With which Alfred Vargrave now watched her ride by,
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,
As he turned from the window, he certainly sighed.

CANTO II.

I.

Letter from LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE *to the* COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

"BIGORRE, Tuesday.
"Your note, Madam, reached me to-day, at Bigorre,
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Before
The night I shall be at Serchon, — where a line,
If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive
My respects.
"Yours sincerely,
"A. VARGRAVE.
"I leave
In an hour."

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this,
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,
The reflections that journey gave rise to. And here
(Because, without some such precaution, I fear
You might fail to distinguish them each from the rest
Of the world they belong to; whose captives are drest,
As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,
While the coat cut for Peter is passed on to Paul)
I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass
The persons I want, as before you they pass,
To label them broadly in plain black and white
On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he 's in sight,
I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er
When a man may in all things be all. We have more
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own
Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,
In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more
Than the 'live giant's eyesight availed to explore;
And in life's lengthened alphabet what used to be
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.
A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,
But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.
A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,
Till a More or Lavater step into his place:
Then the world turns and makes an admiring grimace.
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,

Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,
Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.
Now the men are so many and small, disengage
One man from the million to mark him, next moment
The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your comment;
And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)
'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,
We take the whole age for a hero, in want
Of a better; and still, in its favor, descant
On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find
In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

IV.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve
So little, because of the much they conceive.
With irresolute finger he knocked at each one
Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.
His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,
And whatever he did he was sure to regret.
That target, discussed by the travellers of old,
Which to one appeared argent, to one appeared gold,
To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,
Appeared in one moment both golden and argent.
The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,
May hope to achieve it before life be done:
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows
A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm
That crawls on in the dust to the definite term
Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more
Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,
In its limited vision, is happier far
Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fixed by no friendly star,
Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows
Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

V.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,
Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seemed able
To dazzle, but not to illumine mankind.
A vigorous, various, versatile mind;
A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,
As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,
Vague, flitting, but on it forever impressing
The shape of some substance at which you stand guessing:
When you said, "All is worthless and weak here," behold!
Into sight on a sudden there seemed to unfold
Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man:
When you said, "This is genius," the outlines grew wan.
And his life, though in all things so gifted and skilled,
Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfilled.

VI.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower
The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of his power
Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!
In that life one occasion, one moment, there was
When this earnestness might, with the life-sap of youth,
Lusty fruitage have borne in his manhood's full growth;
But it found him too soon, when his nature was still
The delicate toy of too pliant a will,
The boisterous wind of the world to resist,
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He missed
That occasion, too rathe in its advent.
Since then,
He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,
That intensity in him, which only left sore
The heart it disturbed, to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,
In resigning the power he lacked power to support,
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the court,
In his converse this man for self-comfort appealed
To a cynic denial of all he concealed
In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.
Words, however, are things: and the man who accords
To his language the license to outrage his soul
Is controlled by the words he disdains to control.
And, therefore, he seemed in the deeds of each day,
The light code proclaimed on his lips to obey;
And, the slave of each whim, followed wilfully aught
That perchance fooled the fancy, or flattered the thought.
Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirred themselves — strove to start
Into deeds — though deposed, in that Hades, his heart,
Like those antique Theogonies ruined and hurled
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the world,
Heaved, in earthquake, their heads the rent caverns above,
To trouble at times in the light court of Jove
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,
Of wronged rebel powers that owned not their law.

For his sake, I am fain to believe that, if born
To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid scorn
Secured by the world's stern resistance), where strife,
Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to life,
He possibly might have contrived to attain
Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,
Had he been of his own house the first-born, each gift
Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift
A great name by a name's greatest uses.
But there
He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,
To life's great realities; part of no plan;
And if ever a nobler and happier man
He might hope to become, that alone could be when
With all that is real in life and in men
What was real in him should have been reconciled;
When each influence now from experience exiled
Should have seized on his being, combined with his nature,
And formed, as by fusion, a new human creature:
As when those airy elements viewless to sight
(The amalgam of which, if our science be right,
The germ of this populous planet doth fold)
Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold!
Where a void seemed before there a substance appears,
From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres!

VII.

But the permanent cause why his life failed and missed
The full value of life was, — where man should resist
The world, which man's genius is called to command,
He gave way, less from lack of the power to withstand,
Than from lack of the resolute will to retain
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to gain.

Let this character go in the old-fashioned way,
With the moral thereof tightly tacked to it. Say —
"Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 't will fly at his heels:
Let him fearlessly face it, 't will leave him alone:
But 't will fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone."

VIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,
Was unfolding from darkness and dream-land the lull
Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills
Watched, well-pleased, their fair slaves, the light, foam-footed rills,
Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of their courts,
And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports.
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeying far)
Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,
And brokenly humming an old opera strain,
And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain
Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;
When suddenly, out of the neighboring night,
A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,
And so startled his steed, that was winding at will
Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led
O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its head
Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand
Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,
Both rider and horse might have been in a trice
Hurled horribly over the grim precipice.

IX.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,
And the oath, with which nothing can find unprovided
A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,
Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did
Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not ruder
Than such inroad would warrant, surveyed the intruder,
Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory
My hero, and finished abruptly this story.

X.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,
Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,
Wore his beard and mustache in the fashion of France.
His face, which was pale, gathered force from the glance
Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.
With a gest of apology, touched with surprise,
He lifted his hat, bowed and courteously made
Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as betrayed,
At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XI.

I swear
I have wandered about in the world everywhere;
From many strange mouths have heard many strange tongues;
Strained with many strange idioms my lips and my lungs;
Walked in many a far land, regretting my own;
In many a language groaned many a groan;
And have often had reason to curse those wild fellows
Who built the high house at which Heaven turned jealous,
Making human audacity stumble and stammer
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of Grammar.
But the language of languages dearest to me
Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie*,

When, together, we bent o'er your nose-
gay for hours,
You explained what was silently said by
the flowers,
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a
flame
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you
murmured, *Je t'aime.*

XII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks; the Spanish
Smell, I fancy, of garlic; the Swedish and Danish
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod, in
Their accent for mouths not descended from Odin;
German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheezing
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneezing;
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly fluttered
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had been uttered.
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve,
I feel myself quietly falling in love.

XIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark
Without fear.
And thus, not disagreeably impressed,
As it seemed, with each other, the two men abreast
Rode on slowly a moment.

XIV.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are
A smoker. Allow me!

ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.
Do you go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see
How narrow the path is. I 'm tempted to ask
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)
In your company.

ALFRED.

Charmed, Sir, to find your road lies
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.
In the distant savannas a talisman grows
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who knows?
That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevart* outbroke,
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in smoke.
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)
Have done more in their way human kind to unite,
Perchance, than ten Proudhons.

STRANGER.

Yes. Ah, what a scene!

ALFRED.

Humph! Nature is here too pretentious. Her mien
Is too haughty. One likes to be coaxed, not compelled,
To the notice such beauty resents if withheld.
She seems to be saying too plainly, "Admire me!"
And I answer, "Yes, madam, I do: but you tire me."

STRANGER.

That sunset, just now though . . .

ALFRED.

A very old trick!
One would think that the sun by this time must be sick
Of blushing at what, by this time, he must know
Too well to be shocked by — this world.

STRANGER.

Ah, 't is so
With us all. 'T is the sinner that best knew the world
At twenty, whose lip is, at sixty, most curled
With disdain of its follies. You stay at Serchon?

ALFRED.

A day or two only.

STRANGER.

The season is done.

ALFRED.

Already?

STRANGER.

'T was shorter this year than the last.
Folly soon wears her shoes out. She dances so fast,
We are all of us tired.

ALFRED.

You know the place well?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle
Of the Baths at this moment?

STRANGER.

The same who has been
The belle of all places in which she is seen;
The belle of all Paris last winter; last spring
The belle of all Baden.

ALFRED.

An uncommon thing!

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty! . . . I rather should say,
An uncommon character. Truly, each day
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers?

STRANGER.

Do you know her?

ALFRED.

I know,
Or, rather, I knew her — a long time ago.
I almost forget . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit! what a grace
In her language! her movements! what play in her face!
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal!

ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,
But not like a lover. What interests me so
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,
A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this shade
Which you speak of? . . . it almost would make me afraid
Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have grown,
Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own
I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet
They have all lacked the skill to console this regret
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems still
To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

XV.

The stranger replied, not without irritation:
"I have heard that an Englishman — one of your nation,
I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,
To excuse the contempt which I . . ."

ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his crime?

STRANGER.

O, nothing! His folly was not so sublime
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

ALFRED.

How?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . I admit,
Although I myself have no passion for it,
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise
The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,
With a ruthless dissection; since he, I suppose,
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he does.
But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots
The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots,
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and haws, —
One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so nipped
To catch the young rascal and have him well whipped!

ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English hand,
Has injured your Rosebud of France?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know,
But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show
The last act of a tragedy in their regard:
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not hard
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have been,
And what sort of actors have passed o'er the scene.
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out, and burnt up
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze down the cup
Of extinguished volcanoes: you judge of the fire
Once there, by the ravage you see; — the desire,
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

ALFRED.

Humph! . . . I see you have finished, at last, your cigar.
Can I offer another?

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are
Not two miles from Serchon.

ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XVI.

Here a pause fell
On their converse. Still musingly on, side by side,
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each, for the rest
Of their journey, although they still rode on abreast,
Continued to follow in silence the train
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain;
And each, as though roused from a deep revery,
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,
With the lamps twinkling through them — the quaint wooden roofs —
The little white houses.
The clatter of hoofs,
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals
Reached them, crossed by the sound of the clacking of whips,
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips
Of verdant rose-gardens, deep-sheltered with screens
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,
They could mark the white dresses, and catch the light songs,
Of the lovely Parisians that wandered in throngs,
Led by Laughter and Love through the cold eventide
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hillside.

XVII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'Hérisson,
(Pray go there, if ever you go to Serchon!)
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reached it, alighted
And exchanged their last greetings.
The Frenchman invited
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined
In his own rooms that night.
With an unquiet eye
He watched his companion depart; nor knew why,
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.
"The fellow 's good-looking," he murmured at last,
"And yet not a coxcomb." Some ghost of the past
Vexed him still.
"If he love her," he thought, "let him win her."
Then he turned to the future — and ordered his dinner.

XVIII.

O hour of all hours, the most blessed upon earth,
Blesséd hour of our dinners!
The land of his birth;
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;
The twaddle of friends and the venom of foes;
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;
The money he borrowed, the money he spent; —
All of these things a man, I believe, may forget,
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet
Never, never, O never! earth's luckiest sinner
Hath unpunished forgotten the hour of his dinner!
Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,
Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some ache

Or some pain ; and trouble, remorseless, his best ease,
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XIX.

We may live without poetry, music, and art ;
We may live without conscience, and live without heart ;
We may live without friends ; we may live without books ;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
He may live without books, — what is knowledge but grieving ?
He may live without hope, — what is hope but deceiving ?
He may live without love, — what is passion but pining ?
But where is the man that can live without dining ?

XX.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note
From Lucile.
"Your last letter has reached me," she wrote.
"This evening, alas ! I must go to the ball,
And shall not be at home till too late for your call ;
But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*, at One
You will find me at home, and will find me alone.
Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,
For the honor with which you adhere to your word.
Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred ! To-morrow, then.
"L."

XXI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down
This note, as he poured out his wine. I must own
That I think he himself could have hardly explained
Those feelings exactly.
"Yes, yes," as he drained
The glass down, he muttered, "Jack 's right, after all.
The coquette ! "

"Does milord mean to go to the ball ? "
Asked the waiter, who lingered.
"Perhaps. I don't know.
You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go."

XXII.

O, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,
When seasoned by love, which no rancor disturbs,
And sweetened by all that is sweetest in life,
Than turbot, bisque, ortolans, eaten in strife !
But if, out of humor, and hungry, alone,
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,
The chances are ten against one, I must own,
He gets up as ill-tempered as when he sat down.
And if any reader this fact to dispute is
Disposed, I say . . . "*Allium edat cicutis Nocentius !*"
Over the fruit and the wine
Undisturbed the wasp settled. The evening was fine.
Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.
The window was open. The warm air without
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were about.
In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXIII.

Gay sounds from below
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,
And night deepened apace ; through the dark avenues
The lamps twinkled bright ; and by threes, and by twos,
The idlers of Serchon were strolling at will,
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-sill,
Where his gaze, as he languidly turned it, fell o'er

His late travelling companion, now passing before
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,
In full toilet, — boots varnished, and snowy cravat,
Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,
As he turned down the avenue.
Watching above,
From his window, the stranger, who stopped as he walked
To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now talked,
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discerned,
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were turned,
That this unknown acquaintance, now bound for the ball,
Was a person of rank or of fashion; for all
Whom he bowed to in passing, or stopped with and chattered,
Walked on with a look which implied . . . "I feel flattered!"

XXIV.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXV.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.
He had finished, one after the other, a dozen
Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin:
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile:
He had thought about many things: thought a great deal
Of himself: of his past life, his future, his present:
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor crescent:
Of the gay world, so sad! life, so sweet and so sour!
He had thought, too, of glory, and fortune, and power:
Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy, and
A poet's asylum in some distant land:
Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no doubt,
In particular; also he had thought much about
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner; and last,
He thought that the night would be stupidly passed,
If he thought any more of such matters at all:
So he rose, and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXVI.

I believe, ere he finished his tardy toilet,
That Lord Alfred had spoiled, and flung by in a pet,
Half a dozen white neckcloths, and looked for the nonce
Twenty times in the glass, if he looked in it once.
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,
When he reached the Casino, although he walked fast,
He heard, as he hurriedly entered the door,
The church-clock strike Twelve.

XXVII.

The last waltz was just o'er.
The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.
A crowd blocked the door: and a buzz and a mutter
Went about in the room as a young man, whose face
Lord Alfred had seen ere he entered that place,
But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and warm
Flowery porch, with a lady that leaned on his arm
Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,
Left the ballroom.

XXVIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise
Reached Lord Alfred as just then he entered.
"*Ma foi!*"
Said a Frenchman beside him, . . .
"That lucky Luvois
Has obtained all the gifts of the gods . . . rank and wealth,

"The last waltz was just o'er." Page 28.

And good looks, and then such inexhaustible health !
He that hath shall have more ; and this truth, I surmise,
Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes
Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguished than all,
He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball."
"Is it true," asked a lady, aggressively fat,
Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat
By another that looked like a needle, all steel
And tenuity, — "Luvois will marry Lucile ?"
The needle seemed jerked by a virulent twitch,
As though it were bent upon driving a stitch
Through somebody's character.
"Madam," replied,
Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,
And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,
"I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,
If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused."
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.
"Refused ! . . . what ! a young Duke, not thirty, my dear,
With at least half a million (what is it ?) a year !"
"That may be," said the third ; "yet I know some time since
Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a Prince.
But Luvois, who was never before in his life
In love with a woman who was not a wife,
Is now certainly serious."

XXIX.

The music once more Recommenced.

XXX.

Said Lord Alfred, "This ball is a bore !"
And returned to the inn, somewhat worse than before.

XXXI.

There, whilst musing he leaned the dark valley above,
Through the warm land were wandering the spirits of love.
A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirred ;
In the blossomed acacia the lone cricket chirred ;
The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in light.
Repose, and yet rapture ! that pensive wild nature
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature !
A stone's-throw from thence, through the large lime-trees peeped,
In a garden of roses, a white châlet, steeped
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to the lawn ;
The casements were open ; the curtains were drawn ;
Lights streamed from the inside ; and with them the sound
Of music and song. In the garden, around
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,
Half a dozen young men and young women were met.
Light, laughter, and voices, and music, all streamed
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window there seemed
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,
Of a white dress, a white neck, and soft dusky hair,
Which Lord Alfred remembered . . . a moment or so
It hovered, then passed into shadow ; and slow
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,
Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung :

"Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth !
The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,
And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth
'Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the sea.

"And this ship is a world. She is freighted with souls,

She is freighted with merchandise : proudly she sails
With the Labor that stores, and the Will that controls
The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the rose,
And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,
Past the harbors of Traffic, sublimely she goes,
Man's hopes o'er the world of the waters to bear!

"Where the cheer from the harbors of Traffic is heard,
Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the sight,
O'er the rose, o'er the cedar, there passes a bird ;
'T is the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

"And that bird, bright and bold as a Poet's desire,
Roams her own native heavens, the realms of her birth.
There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a fire,
And her plumage hath never been sullied by earth.

"And the mariners greet her ; there 's song on each lip,
For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.
And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the ship,
Together go forth over ocean and sky.

"Fast, fast fades the land ! far the rose-gardens flee,
And far fleet the harbors. In regions unknown
The ship is alone on a desert of sea,
And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

"In those regions unknown, o'er that desert of air,
Down that desert of waters — tremendous in wrath —
The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,
And cleaves, through the waves of the ocean, his path.

"And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the wave,
Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales :
And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,
Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"Lo ! a wonder, which never before hath been heard,
For it never before hath been given to sight ;
On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,
The Paradise Bird, never known to alight !

"The bird which the mariners blessed, when each lip
Had a song for the omen that gladdened each eye ;
The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship
From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in the sky.

"But the mariners heed not the bird any more.
They are felling the masts, — they are cutting the sails ;
Some are working, some weeping, and some wrangling o'er
Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.

"Souls of men are on board ; wealth of man in the hold ;
And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his prey ;
And who heeds the bird ? 'Save the silk and the gold !'
And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps away !

"Poor Paradise Bird ! on her lone flight once more
Back again in the wake of the wind she is driven, —
To be 'whelmed in the storm, or above it to soar,
And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in heaven !

"And the ship rides the waters, and weathers the gales :
From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.

All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,
Save a child, sitting lonely, who misses — the Bird!"

CANTO III.

I.

With stout iron shoes be my Pegasus shod!
For my road is a rough one: flint, stubble, and clod,
Blue clay, and black quagmire, brambles no few,
And I gallop up-hill, now.
There's terror that's true
In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,
Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some devil,
Followed ever one mask through the mad masquerade,
Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('t is said),
He unmasked, with a kiss, the strange lady, and stood
Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.
In this Masque of the Passions, called Life, there's no human
Emotion, though masked, or in man or in woman,
But, when faced and unmasked, it will leave us at last
Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
For truth is appalling and eldrich, as seen
By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life.
Alas! why is Genius forever at strife
With the world, which, despite the world's self, it ennobles?
Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles
And offends the effete life it comes to renew?
'T is the terror of truth! 't is that Genius is true!

II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)
Was a woman of genius: whose genius, indeed,
With her life was at war. Once, but once, in that life
The chance had been hers to escape from this strife
In herself; finding peace in the life of another
From the passionate wants she, in hers, failed to smother.
But the chance fell too soon, when the crude restless power
Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,
Only wearied the man it yet haunted and thralled;
And that moment, once lost, had been never recalled.
Yet it left her heart sore: and, to shelter her heart
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art
Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies
Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,
A weapon, at once, and a shield, to conceal
And defend all that women can earnestly feel.
Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,
She felt frightened at times by her very success:
She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars:
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars
If they keep us behind prison-windows: impassioned
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashioned
Out of glittering trifles around it.
Unknown
To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.
The strong spirit in her, had her life but been blended
With some man's whose heart had her own comprehended,
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.
For him she had struggled and striven alone;
For him had aspired; in him had transfused
All the gladness and grace of her nature, and used

For him only the spells of its delicate power :
Like the ministering fairy that brings from her bower
To some mage all the treasures, whose use the fond elf,
More enriched by her love, disregards for herself.
But standing apart, as she ever had done,
And her genius, which needed a vent, finding none
In the broad fields of action thrown wide to man's power,
She unconsciously made it her bulwark and tower,
And built in it her refuge, whence lightly she hurled
Her contempt at the fashions and forms of the world.

And the permanent cause why she now missed and failed
That firm hold upon life she so keenly assailed,
Was, in all those diurnal occasions that place
Say — the world and the woman opposed face to face,
Where the woman must yield, she, refusing to stir,
Offended the world, which in turn wounded her.

As before, in the old-fashioned manner, I fit
To this character, also, its moral : to wit,
Say — the world is a nettle ; disturb it, it stings :
Grasp it firmly, it stings not. On one of two things,
If you would not be stung, it behooves you to settle :
Avoid it, or crush it. She crushed not the nettle ;
For she could not ; nor would she avoid it : she tried
With the weak hand of woman to thrust it aside,
And it stung her. A woman is too slight a thing
To trample the world without feeling its sting.

III.

One lodges but simply at Serchon ; yet, thanks
To the season that changes forever the banks
Of the blossoming mountains, and shifts the light cloud
O'er the valley, and hushes or rouses the loud
Wind that wails in the pines, or creeps murmuring down
The dark evergreen slopes to the slumbering town,
And the torrent that falls, faintly heard from afar,
And the bluebells that purple the dapple-gray scaur,
One sees with each month of the many-faced year
A thousand sweet changes of beauty appear.
The châlet where dwelt the Comtesse de Nevers
Rested half up the base of a mountain of firs,
In a garden of roses, revealed to the road,
Yet withdrawn from its noise : 't was a peaceful abode.
And the walls, and the roofs, with their gables like hoods
Which the monks wear, were built of sweet resinous woods.
The sunlight of noon, as Lord Alfred ascended
The steep garden paths, every odor had blended
Of the ardent carnations, and faint heliotropes,
With the balms floated down from the dark wooded slopes :
A light breeze at the windows was playing about,
And the white curtains floated, now in and now out.
The house was all hushed when he rang at the door,
Which was opened to him in a moment, or more,
By an old nodding negress, whose sable head shined
In the sun like a cocoa-nut polished in Ind,
'Neath the snowy *foulard* which about it was wound.

IV.

Lord Alfred sprang forward at once, with a bound.
He remembered the nurse of Lucile. The old dame,
Whose teeth and whose eyes used to beam when he came,

With a boy's eager step, in the blithe days of yore,
To pass, unannounced, her young mistress's door.
The old woman had fondled Lucile on her knee
When she left, as an infant, far over the sea,
In India, the tomb of a mother, unknown,
To pine, a pale floweret, in great Paris town.
She had soothed the child's sobs on her breast, when she read
The letter that told her her father was dead.
An astute, shrewd adventurer, who, like Ulysses,
Had studied men, cities, laws, wars, the abysses
Of statecraft, with varying fortunes, was he.
He had wandered the world through, by land and by sea,
And knew it in most of its phases. Strong will,
Subtle tact, and soft manners, had given him skill
To conciliate Fortune, and courage to brave
Her displeasure. Thrice shipwrecked, and cast by the wave
On his own quick resources, they rarely had failed
His command: often baffled, he ever prevailed,
In his combat with fate: to-day flattered and fed
By monarchs, to-morrow in search of mere bread.
The offspring of times trouble-haunted, he came
Of a family ruined, yet noble in name.
He lost sight of his fortune, at twenty, in France;
And, half statesman, half soldier, and wholly Free-lance,
Had wandered in search of it, over the world,
Into India.
But scarce had the nomad unfurled
His wandering tent at Mysore, in the smile
Of a Rajah (whose court he controlled for a while,
And whose council he prompted and governed by stealth);
Scarce, indeed, had he wedded an Indian of wealth,
Who died giving birth to this daughter, before
He was borne to the tomb of his wife at Mysore.
His fortune, which fell to his orphan, perchance,
Had secured her a home with his sister in France,
A lone woman, the last of the race left. Lucile
Neither felt, nor affected, the wish to conceal
The half-Eastern blood, which appeared to bequeath
(Revealed now and then, though but rarely, beneath
That outward repose that concealed it in her)
A something half wild to her strange character.
The nurse with the orphan, awhile broken-hearted,
At the door of a convent in Paris had parted.
But later, once more, with her mistress she tarried,
When the girl, by that grim maiden aunt, had been married
To a dreary old Count, who had sullenly died,
With no claim on her tears, — she had wept as a bride.
Said Lord Alfred, "Your mistress expects me."
The crone
Oped the drawing-room door, and there left him alone.

V.

O'er the soft atmosphere of this temple of grace
Rested silence and perfume. No sound reached the place.
In the white curtains wavered the delicate shade
Of the heaving acacias, through which the breeze played.
O'er the smooth wooden floor, polished dark as a glass,
Fragrant white Indian matting allowed you to pass.
In light olive baskets, by window and door,
Some hung from the ceiling, some crowding the floor,

Rich wild-flowers plucked by Lucile from the hill,
Seemed the room with their passionate presence to fill :
Blue aconite, hid in white roses, reposed ;
The deep belladonna its vermeil disclosed ;
And the frail saponaire, and the tender bluebell,
And the purple valerian, — each child of the fell
And the solitude flourished, fed fair from the source
Of waters the huntsman scarce heeds in his course,
Where the chamois and izard, with delicate hoof,
Pause or flit through the pinnacled silence aloof.

VI.

Here you felt, by the sense of its beauty reposed,
That you stood in a shrine of sweet thoughts. Half unclosed
In the light slept the flowers : all was pure and at rest ;
All peaceful ; all modest ; all seemed self-possessed,
And aware of the silence. No vestige nor trace
Of a young woman's coquetry troubled the place.
He stood by the window. A cloud passed the sun.
A light breeze uplifted the leaves, one by one.
Just then Lucile entered the room, undiscerned
By Lord Alfred, whose face to the window was turned,
In a strange revery.
The time was, when Lucile,
In beholding that man, could not help but reveal
The rapture, the fear, which wrenched out every nerve
In the heart of the girl from the woman's reserve.
And now — she gazed at him, calm, smiling, — perchance
Indifferent.

VII.

Indifferently turning his glance,
Alfred Vargrave encountered that gaze unaware.
O'er a bodice snow-white streamed her soft dusky hair ;
A rose-bud half blown in her hand ; in her eyes
A half-pensive smile.
A sharp cry of surprise
Escaped from his lips : some unknown agitation,
An invincible trouble, a strange palpitation,
Confused his ingenious and frivolous wit;
Overtook, and entangled, and paralyzed it.
That wit so complacent and docile, that ever
Lightly came at the call of the lightest endeavor,
Ready coined, and availably current as gold,
Which, secure of its value, so fluently rolled
In free circulation from hand on to hand
For the usage of all, at a moment's command ;
For once it rebelled, it was mute and unstirred,
And he looked at Lucile without speaking a word.

VIII.

Perhaps what so troubled him was, that the face
On whose features he gazed had no more than a trace
Of the face his remembrance had imaged for years.
Yes ! the face he remembered was faded with tears :
Grief had famished the figure, and dimmed the dark eyes,
And starved the pale lips, too acquainted with sighs.
And that tender, and gracious, and fond *coquetterie*
Of a woman who knows her least ribbon to be
Something dear to the lips that so warmly caress
Every sacred detail of her exquisite dress,
In the careless toilet of Lucile, — then too sad
To care aught to her changeable beauty to add, —
Lord Alfred had never admired before !
Alas ! poor Lucile, in those weak days of yore,
Had neglected herself, never heeding, nor thinking

(While the blossom and bloom of her beauty were shrinking)
That sorrow can beautify only the heart—
Not the face — of a woman; and can but impart
Its endearment to one that has suffered. In truth
Grief hath beauty for grief; but gay youth loves gay youth.

IX.

The woman that now met, unshrinking, his gaze,
Seemed to bask in the silent but sumptuous haze
Of that soft second summer, more ripe than the first,
Which returns when the bud to the blossom hath burst

In despite of the stormiest April. Lucile
Had acquired that matchless unconscious appeal
To the homage which none but a churl would withhold —
That caressing and exquisite grace — never bold,
Ever present — which just a few women possess.
From a healthful repose, undisturbed by the stress
Of unquiet emotions, her soft cheek had drawn
A freshness as pure as the twilight of dawn.
Her figure, though slight, had revived everywhere
The luxurious proportions of youth; and her hair —
Once shorn as an offering to passionate love —
Now floated or rested redundant above
Her airy pure forehead and throat; gathered loose
Under which, by one violet knot, the profuse
Milk-white folds of a cool modest garment reposed,
Rippled faint by the breast they half hid, half disclosed,
And her simple attire thus in all things revealed
The fine art which so artfully all things concealed.

X.

Lord Alfred, who never conceived that Lucile
Could have looked so enchanting, felt tempted to kneel
At her feet, and her pardon with passion implore;
But the calm smile that met him sufficed to restore
The pride and the bitterness needed to meet
The occasion with dignity due and discreet.

XI.

"Madam," — thus he began with a voice reassured, —
"You see that your latest command has secured
My immediate obedience, — presuming I may
Consider my freedom restored from this day." —
"I had thought," said Lucile, with a smile gay yet sad,
"That your freedom from me not a fetter has had.
Indeed! . . . in my chains have you rested till now?
I had not so flattered myself, I avow!"
"For Heaven's sake, Madam," Lord Alfred replied,
"Do not jest! has the moment no sadness?" he sighed.
"'T is an ancient tradition," she answered, "a tale
Often told, — a position too sure to prevail
In the end of all legends of love. If we wrote,
When we first love, foreseeing that hour yet remote,
Wherein of necessity each would recall
From the other the poor foolish records of all
Those emotions, whose pain, when recorded, seemed bliss,
Should we write as we wrote? But one thinks not of this!
At Twenty (who does not at Twenty?) we write
Believing eternal the frail vows we plight;
And we smile with a confident pity, above
The vulgar results of all poor human love:
For we deem, with that vanity common to youth,
Because what we feel in our bosoms, in truth,
Is novel to us — that 't is novel to earth,
And will prove the exception, in durance and worth,
To the great law to which all on earth must incline.
The error was noble, the vanity fine!
Shall we blame it because we survive it? ah, no;
'T was the youth of our youth, my lord, is it not so?"

XII.

Lord Alfred was mute. He remembered her yet
A child, — the weak sport of each moment's regret,
Blindly yielding herself to the errors of life,

The deceptions of youth, and borne down by the strife
And the tumult of passion; the tremulous toy
Of each transient emotion of grief or of joy.
But to watch her pronounce the death-warrant of all
The illusions of life, — lift, unflinching, the pall
From the bier of the dead Past, — that woman so fair,
And so young, yet her own self-survivor; who there
Traced her life's epitaph with a finger so cold!
'T was a picture that pained his self-love to behold.
He himself knew — none better — the things to be said
Upon subjects like this. Yet he bowed down his head:
And as thus, with a trouble he could not command,
He paused, crumpling the letters he held in his hand,
"You know me enough," she continued, "or what
I would say is, you yet recollect (do you not,
Lord Alfred?) enough of my nature, to know
That these pledges of what was perhaps long ago
A foolish affection, I do not recall
From those motives of prudence which actuate all
Or most women when their love ceases. Indeed,
If you have such a doubt, to dispel it I need
But remind you that ten years these letters have rested
Unreclaimed in your hands." A reproach seemed suggested
By these words. To meet it, Lord Alfred looked up.
(His gaze had been fixed on a blue Sèvres cup
With a look of profound connoisseurship, — a smile
Of singular interest and care, all this while.)
He looked up, and looked long in the face of Lucile,
To mark if that face by a sign would reveal
At the thought of Miss Darcy the least jealous pain.
He looked keenly and long, yet he looked there in vain.
"You are generous, Madam," he murmured at last,
And into his voice a light irony passed.
He had looked for reproaches, and fully arranged
His forces. But straightway the enemy changed
The position.

XIII.

"Come!" gayly Lucile interposed,
With a smile whose divinely deep sweetness disclosed
Some depth in her nature he never had known,
While she tenderly laid her light hand on his own,
"Do not think I abuse the occasion. We gain
Justice, judgment, with years, or else years are in vain.
From me not a single reproach can you hear.
I have sinned to myself, — to the world, — nay, I fear
To you chiefly. The woman who loves should, indeed,
Be the friend of the man that she loves. She should heed
Not her selfish and often mistaken desires,
But his interest whose fate her own interest inspires;
And, rather than seek to allure, for her sake,
His life down the turbulent, fanciful wake
Of impossible destinies, use all her art
That his place in the world find its place in her heart.
I, alas! — I perceived not this truth till too late;
I tormented your youth, I have darkened your fate.
Forgive me the ill I have done for the sake
Of its long expiation!"

XIV.

Lord Alfred, awake,
Seemed to wander from dream on to dream. In that seat
Where he sat as a criminal, ready to meet

His accuser, he found himself turned by some change,
As surprising and all unexpected as strange,
To the judge from whose mercy indulgence was sought.
All the world's foolish pride in that moment was naught;
He felt all his plausible theories posed;
And, thrilled by the beauty of nature disclosed
In the pathos of all he had witnessed, his head
He bowed, and faint words self-reproachfully said,
As he lifted her hand to his lips. 'T was a hand
White, delicate, dimpled, warm, languid, and bland.
The hand of a woman is often, in youth,
Somewhat rough, somewhat red, somewhat graceless, in truth;
Does its beauty refine, as its pulses grow calm,
Or as Sorrow has crossed the life-line in the palm?

XV.

The more that he looked, that he listened, the more
He discovered perfections unnoticed before.
Less salient than once, less poetic, perchance,
This woman who thus had survived the romance
That had made him its hero, and breathed him its sighs,
Seemed more charming a thousand times o'er to his eyes.
Together they talked of the years since when last
They parted, contrasting the present, the past.
Yet no memory marred their light converse. Lucile
Questioned much, with the interest a sister might feel,
Of Lord Alfred's new life, — of Miss Darcy, — her face,
Her temper, accomplishments, — pausing to trace
The advantage derived from a hymen so fit.
Of herself, she recounted with humor and wit
Her journeys, her daily employments, the lands
She had seen, and the books she had read, and the hands
She had shaken.
In all that she said there appeared
An amiable irony. Laughing, she reared
The temple of reason, with ever a touch
Of light scorn at her work, revealed only so much
As there gleams, in the thyrsus that Bacchanals bear,
Through the blooms of a garland the point of a spear.
But above, and beneath, and beyond all of this,
To that soul, whose experience had paralyzed bliss,
A benignant indulgence, to all things resigned,
A justice, a sweetness, a meekness of mind,
Gave a luminous beauty, as tender and faint
And serene as the halo encircling a saint.

XVI.

Unobserved by Lord Alfred the time fleeted by.
To each novel sensation spontaneously
He abandoned himself with that ardor so strange
Which belongs to a mind grown accustomed to change.
He sought, with well-practised and delicate art,
To surprise from Lucile the true state of her heart;
But his efforts were vain, and the woman, as ever,
More adroit than the man, baffled every endeavor.
When he deemed he had touched on some chord in her being,
At the touch it dissolved, and was gone. Ever fleeing
As ever he near it advanced, when he thought
To have seized, and proceeded to analyze aught
Of the moral existence, the absolute soul,
Light as vapor the phantom escaped his control.

XVII.

From the hall, on a sudden, a sharp ring was heard.
In the passage without a quick footstep there stirred.

At the door knocked the negress, and thrust in her head,
"The Duke de Luvois had just entered," she said,
"And insisted" —
"The Duke!" cried Lucile (as she spoke
The Duke's step, approaching, a light echo woke).
"Say I do not receive till the evening. Explain,"
As she glanced at Lord Alfred, she added again,
"I have business of private importance."
There came
O'er Lord Alfred at once, at the sound of that name,
An invincible sense of vexation. He turned
To Lucile, and he fancied he faintly discerned
On her face an indefinite look of confusion.
On his mind instantaneously flashed the conclusion,
That his presence had caused it.
He said, with a sneer
Which he could not repress, "Let not *me* interfere
With the claims on your time, lady! when you are free
From more pleasant engagements, allow me to see
And to wait on you later."
The words were not said
Ere he wished to recall them. He bitterly read
The mistake he had made in Lucile's flashing eye.
Inclining her head, as in haughty reply,
More reproachful perchance than all uttered rebuke,
She said merely, resuming her seat,
"Tell the Duke
He may enter."
And vexed with his own words and hers,
Alfred Vargrave bowed low to Lucile de Nevers,
Passed the casement and entered the garden. Before
His shadow was fled the Duke stood at the door.

XVIII.

When left to his thoughts in the garden alone,
Alfred Vargrave stood, strange to himself. With dull tone
Of importance, through cities of rose and carnation,
Went the bee on his business from station to station.
The minute mirth of summer was shrill all around;
Its incessant small voices like stings seemed to sound
On his sore angry sense. He stood grieving the hot
Solid sun with his shadow, nor stirred from the spot.
The last look of Lucile still bewildered, perplexed,
And reproached him. The Duke's visit goaded and vexed.
He had not yet given the letters. Again
He must visit Lucile. He resolved to remain
Where he was till the Duke went. In short, he would stay,
Were it only to know when the Duke went away.
But just as he formed this resolve, he perceived
Approaching towards him, between the thick-leaved
And luxuriant laurels, Lucile and the Duke.
Thus surprised, his first thought was to seek for some nook
Whence he might, unobserved, from the garden retreat.
They had not yet seen him. The sound of their feet
And their voices had warned him in time. They were walking
Towards him. The Duke (a true Frenchman) was talking
With the action of Talma. He saw at a glance
That they barred the sole path to the gateway. No chance
Of escape save in instant concealment! Deep-dipped
In thick foliage, an arbor stood near. In he slipped,
Saved from sight, as in front of that ambush they passed,
Still conversing. Beneath a laburnum at last
They paused, and sat down on a bench in the shade,
So close that he could not but hear what they said.

XIX.

LUCILE.

Duke, I scarcely conceive . . .

LUVOIS.

Ah, forgive! . . . I desired
So deeply to see you to-day. You retired
So early last night from the ball . . . this whole week
I have seen you pale, silent, preoccupied . . . speak,
Speak, Lucile, and forgive me! . . . I know that I am
A rash fool — but I love you! I love you, Madame,
More than language can say! Do not deem, O Lucile,
That the love I no longer have strength to conceal
Is a passing caprice! It is strange to my nature,
It has made me, unknown to myself, a new creature.
I implore you to sanction and save the new life
Which I lay at your feet with this prayer — Be my wife;
Stoop, and raise me!

Lord Alfred could scarcely restrain
The sudden, acute pang of anger and pain
With which he had heard this. As though to some wind
The leaves of the hushed windless laurels behind
The two thus in converse were suddenly stirred.
The sound half betrayed him. They started. He heard
The low voice of Lucile; but so faint was its tone
That her answer escaped him.
Luvois hurried on,
As though in remonstrance with what had been spoken.
"Nay, I know it, Lucile! but your heart was not broken
By the trial in which all its fibres were proved.
Love, perchance, you mistrust, yet you need to be loved.
You mistake your own feelings. I fear you mistake
What so ill I interpret, those feelings which make
Words like these vague and feeble. Whatever your heart
May have suffered of yore, this can only impart
A pity profound to the love which I feel.
Hush! hush! I know all. Tell me nothing, Lucile."
"You know all, Duke?" she said; "well then, know that, in truth,
I have learned from the rude lesson taught to my youth
From my own heart to shelter my life; to mistrust
The heart of another. We are what we must,
And not what we would be. I know that one hour
Assures not another. The will and the power
Are diverse."
"O madam!" he answered, "you fence
With a feeling you know to be true and intense.
'T is not *my* life, Lucile, that I plead for alone:
If your nature I know, 't is no less for your own.
That nature will prey on itself; it was made
To influence others. Consider," he said,
"That genius craves power, — what scope for it here?
Gifts less noble to *me* give command of that sphere
In which genius *is* power. Such gifts you despise?
But you do not disdain what such gifts realize!
I offer you, Lady, a name not unknown —
A fortune which worthless, without you, is grown —
All my life at your feet I lay down — at your feet
A heart which for you, and you only, can beat."

LUCILE.

That heart, Duke, that life — I respect both. The name
And position you offer, and all that you claim
In behalf of their nobler employment, I feel
To deserve what, in turn, I now ask you —

LUVOIS.

Lucile!

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me —

LUVOIS.

You do not reject?

LUCILE.

I ask you to leave me the time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

You ask me? —

LUCILE.

— The time to reflect.

LUVOIS.

Say — One word!
May I hope?
The reply of Lucile was not heard
By Lord Alfred; for just then she rose, and moved on.
The Duke bowed his lips o'er her hand, and was gone.

XX.

Not a sound save the birds in the bushes. And when
Alfred Vargrave reeled forth to the sunlight again,
He just saw the white robe of the woman recede
As she entered the house.
Scarcely conscious indeed
Of his steps, he too followed, and entered.

XXI.

He entered
Unnoticed; Lucile never stirred: so concentred
And wholly absorbed in her thoughts she appeared.
Her back to the window was turned. As he neared
The sofa, her face from the glass was reflected.
Her dark eyes were fixed on the ground. Pale, dejected,
And lost in profound meditation she seemed.
Softly, silently, over her drooped shoulders streamed
The afternoon sunlight. The cry of alarm
And surprise which escaped her, as now on her arm
Alfred Vargrave let fall a hand icily cold
And clammy as death, all too cruelly told
How far he had been from her thoughts.

XXII.

All his cheek
Was disturbed with the effort it cost him to speak.
"It was not my fault. I have heard all," he said.
"Now the letters — and farewell, Lucile! When you wed
May —"
The sentence broke short, like a weapon that snaps
When the weight of a man is upon it.
"Perhaps,"
Said Lucile (her sole answer revealed in the flush
Of quick color which up to her brows seemed to rush
In reply to those few broken words), "this farewell
Is our last, Alfred Vargrave, in life. Who can tell?
Let us part without bitterness. Here are your letters.
Be assured I retain you no more in my fetters!" —
She laughed, as she said this, a little sad laugh,
And stretched out her hand with the letters. And half
Wroth to feel his wrath rise, and unable to trust
His own powers of restraint, in his bosom he thrust
The packet she gave, with a short angry sigh,
Bowed his head, and departed without a reply.

XXIII.

And Lucile was alone. And the men of the world
Were gone back to the world. And the world's self was furled
Far away from the heart of the woman. Her hand
Drooped, and from it, unloosed from their frail silken band,

Fell those early love-letters, strewn, scattered, and shed
At her feet — life's lost blossoms! Dejected, her head
On her bosom was bowed. Her gaze vaguely strayed o'er
Those strewn records of passionate moments no more.
From each page to her sight leapt some word that belied
The composure with which she that day had denied
Every claim on her heart to those poor perished years.
They avenged themselves now, and she burst into tears.

CANTO IV.

I.

Letter from COUSIN JOHN *to* COUSIN ALFRED.

"BIGORRE, Thursday.

"TIME up, you rascal! Come back, or be hanged.
Matilda grows peevish. Her mother harangued
For a whole hour this morning about you. The deuce!
What on earth can I say to you? — Nothing 's of use.
And the blame of the whole of your shocking behavior
Falls on *me*, sir! Come back, — do you hear? — or I leave your
Affairs, and abjure you forever. Come back
To your anxious betrothed; and perplexed

"COUSIN JACK."

II.

Alfred needed, in truth, no entreaties from John
To increase his impatience to fly from Serchon.
All the place was now fraught with sensations of pain
Which, whilst in it, he strove to escape from in vain.
A wild instinct warned him to fly from a place
Where he felt that some fatal event, swift of pace,
Was approaching his life. In despite his endeavor
To think of Matilda, her image forever
Was effaced from his fancy by that of Lucile.
From the ground which he stood on he felt himself reel.
Scared, alarmed by those feelings to which, on the day
Just before, all his heart had so soon given way,
When he caught, with a strange sense of fear, for assistance,
At what was, till then, the great fact in existence,
'T was a phantom he grasped.

III.

Having sent for his guide,
He ordered his horse, and determined to ride
Back forthwith to Bigorre.
Then, the guide, who well knew
Every haunt of those hills, said the wild lake of Oo
Lay a league from Serchon; and suggested a track
By the lake to Bigorre, which, transversing the back
Of the mountain, avoided a circuit between
Two long valleys; and thinking, "Perchance change of scene
May create change of thought," Alfred Vargrave agreed,
Mounted horse, and set forth to Bigorre at full speed.

IV.

His guide rode beside him.
The king of the guides!
The gallant Bernard! ever boldly he rides,
Ever gayly he sings! For to him, from of old,
The hills have confided their secrets, and told
Where the white partridge lies, and the cock o' the woods;
Where the izard flits fine through the cold solitudes;
Where the bear lurks perdu; and the lynx on his prey
At nightfall descends, when the mountains are gray;
Where the sassafras blooms, and the bluebell is born,

And the wild rhododendron first reddens at morn ;
Where the source of the waters is fine as a thread ;
How the storm on the wild Maladetta is spread ;
Where the thunder is hoarded, the snows lie asleep,
Whence the torrents are fed, and the cataracts leap ;
And, familiarly known in the hamlets, the vales
Have whispered to him all their thousand love-tales ;
He has laughed with the girls, he has leaped with the boys ;
Ever blithe, ever bold, ever boon, he enjoys
An existence untroubled by envy or strife,
While he feeds on the dews and the juices of life.
And so lightly he sings, and so gayly he rides,
For BERNÀRD LE SAUTEUR is the king of all guides !

V.

But Bernard found, that day, neither song nor love-tale,
Nor adventure, nor laughter, nor legend avail
To arouse from his deep and profound revery
Him that silent beside him rode fast as could be.

VI.

Ascending the mountain they slackened their pace,
And the marvellous prospect each moment changed face.
The breezy and pure inspirations of morn
Breathed about them. The scarped ravaged mountains, all worn
By the torrents, whose course they watched faintly meander,
Were alive with the diamonded shy salamander.
They paused o'er the bosom of purple abysses,
And wound through a region of green wildernesses ;
The waters went wirbling above and around,
The forests hung heaped in their shadows profound.
Here the Larboust, and there Aventin, Castellon,
Which the Demon of Tempest, descending upon,
Had wasted with fire, and the peaceful Cazeaux
They marked ; and far down in the sunshine below,
Half dipped in a valley of airiest blue,
The white happy homes of the village of Oo,
Where the age is yet golden.
And high overhead
The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread.
Red granite and quartz, in the alchemic sun,
Fused their splendors of crimson and crystal in one ;
And deep in the moss gleamed the delicate shells,
And the dew lingered fresh in the heavy harebells ;
The large violet burned ; the campanula blue ;
And Autumn's own flower, the saffron, peered through
The red-berried brambles and thick sassafras ;
And fragrant with thyme was the delicate grass ;
And high up, and higher, and highest of all,
The secular phantom of snow !
O'er the wall
Of a gray sunless glen gaping drowsy below,
That aerial spectre, revealed in the glow
Of the great golden dawn, hovers faint on the eye,
And appears to grow in, and grow out of, the sky,
And plays with the fancy, and baffles the sight.
Only reached by the vast rosy ripple of light,
And the cool star of eve, the Imperial Thing,
Half unreal, like some mythological king
That dominates all in a fable of old,
Takes command of a valley as fair to behold
As aught in old fables ; and, seen or unseen,
Dwells aloof over all, in the vast and serene

Sacred sky, where the footsteps of spirits are furled
'Mid the clouds beyond which spreads the infinite world
Of man's last aspirations, unfathomed, untrod,
Save by Even and Morn, and the angels of God.

VII.

Meanwhile, as they journeyed, that serpentine road,
Now abruptly reversed, unexpectedly showed
A gay cavalcade some few feet in advance.
Alfred Vargrave's heart beat; for he saw at a glance
The slight form of Lucile in the midst. His next look
Showed him, joyously ambling beside her, the Duke.
The rest of the troop which had thus caught his ken
He knew not, nor noticed them (women and men).
They were laughing and talking together. Soon after
His sudden appearance suspended their laughter.

VIII.

"You here! . . . I imagined you far on your way
To Bigorre!" . . . said Lucile. "What has caused you to stay?"
"I *am* on my way to Bigorre," he replied,
"But, since *my* way would seem to be *yours*, let me ride
For one moment beside you." And then, with a stoop,
At her ear, . . . "and forgive me!"

IX.

By this time the troop
Had regathered its numbers.
Lucile was as pale
As the cloud 'neath their feet, on its way to the vale.
The Duke had observed it, nor quitted her side,
For even one moment, the whole of the ride.
Alfred smiled, as he thought, "he is jealous of her!"
And the thought of this jealousy added a spur
To his firm resolution and effort to please.
He talked much; was witty, and quite at his ease.

X.

After noontide, the clouds, which had traversed the east
Half the day, gathered closer, and rose and increased.
The air changed and chilled. As though out of the ground,
There ran up the trees a confused hissing sound,
And the wind rose. The guides sniffed, like chamois, the air,
And looked at each other, and halted, and there
Unbuckled the cloaks from the saddles. The white
Aspens rustled, and turned up their frail leaves in fright.
All announced the approach of the tempest.
Erelong,
Thick darkness descended the mountains among;
And a vivid, vindictive, and serpentine flash
Gored the darkness, and shore it across with a gash.
The rain fell in large heavy drops. And anon
Broke the thunder.
The horses took fright, every one.
The Duke's in a moment was far out of sight.
The guides whooped. The band was obliged to alight;
And, dispersed up the perilous pathway, walked blind
To the darkness before from the darkness behind.

XI.

And the Storm is abroad in the mountains!
He fills
The crouched hollows and all the oracular hills
With dread voices of power. A roused million or more
Of wild echoes reluctantly rise from their hoar
Immemorial ambush, and roll in the wake
Of the cloud, whose reflection leaves vivid the lake.

And the wind, that wild robber, for plunder descends
From invisible lands, o'er those black mountain ends;
He howls as he hounds down his prey; and his lash
Tears the hair of the timorous wan mountain-ash,
That clings to the rocks, with her garments all torn,
Like a woman in fear; then he blows his hoarse horn,
And is off, the fierce guide of destruction and terror,
Up the desolate heights, 'mid an intricate error
Of mountain and mist.

XII.

There is war in the skies!
Lo! the black-wingéd legions of tempest arise
O'er those sharp splintered rocks that are gleaming below
In the soft light, so fair and so fatal, as though
Some seraph burned through them, the thunder-bolt searching
Which the black cloud unbosomed just now. Lo! the lurching
And shivering pine-trees, like phantoms, that seem
To waver above, in the dark; and yon stream,
How it hurries and roars, on its way to the white
And paralyzed lake there, appalled at the sight
Of the things seen in heaven!

XIII.

Through the darkness and awe
That had gathered around him, Lord Alfred now saw,
Revealed in the fierce and evanishing glare
Of the lightning that momently pulsed through the air,
A woman alone on a shelf of the hill,
With her cheek coldly propped on her hand, — and as still
As the rock that she sat on, which beetled above
The black lake beneath her.
All terror, all love,
Added speed to the instinct with which he rushed on.
For one moment the blue lightning swathed the whole stone
In its lurid embrace: like the sleek dazzling snake
That encircles a sorceress, charmed for her sake
And lulled by her loveliness; fawning, it played
And caressingly twined round the feet and the head
Of the woman who sat there, undaunted and calm
As the soul of that solitude, listing the psalm
Of the plangent and laboring tempest roll slow
From the caldron of midnight and vapor below.
Next moment from bastion to bastion, all round,
Of the siege-circled mountains, there tumbled the sound
Of the battering thunder's indefinite peal,
And Lord Alfred had sprung to the feet of Lucile.

XIV.

She started. Once more, with its flickering wand,
The lightning approached her. In terror, her hand
Alfred Vargrave had seized within his; and he felt
The light fingers that coldly and lingeringly dwelt
In the grasp of his own, tremble faintly.
"See! see!
Where the whirlwind hath stricken and strangled yon tree!"
She exclaimed, . . . "like the passion that brings on its breath,
To the being it embraces, destruction and death!
Alfred Vargrave, the lightning is round you!"
"Lucile!
I hear — I see — naught but yourself. I can feel
Nothing here but your presence. My pride fights in vain
With the truth that leaps from me. We two meet again
'Neath yon terrible heaven that is watching above

To avenge if I lie when I swear that I love, —
And beneath yonder terrible heaven, at your feet,
I humble my head and my heart. I entreat
Your pardon, Lucile, for the past, — I implore
For the future your mercy, — implore it with more
Of passion than prayer ever breathed. By the power
Which invisibly touches us both in this hour,
By the rights I have o'er you, Lucile, I demand" —

"The rights!" . . . said Lucile, and drew from him her hand.

"Yes, the rights! for what greater to man may belong
Than the right to repair in the future the wrong
To the past? and the wrong I have done you, of yore,
Hath bequeathed to me all the sad right to restore,
To retrieve, to amend! I, who injured your life,
Urge the right to repair it, Lucile! Be my wife,
My guide, my good angel, my all upon earth,
And accept, for the sake of what yet may give worth
To my life, its contrition!"

XV.

He paused, for there came
O'er the cheek of Lucile a swift flush like the flame
That illumined at moments the darkness o'erhead.
With a voice faint and marred by emotion, she said,
"And your pledge to another?"

XVI.

"Hush, hush!" he exclaimed,
"My honor will live where my love lives, unshamed.
'T were poor honor indeed, to another to give
That life of which *you* keep the heart. Could I live
In the light of those young eyes, suppressing a lie?
Alas, no! *your* hand holds my whole destiny.
I can never recall what my lips have avowed;
In your love lies whatever can render me proud.
For the great crime of all my existence hath been
To have known you in vain. And the duty best seen,
And most hallowed, — the duty most sacred and sweet,
Is that which hath led me, Lucile, to your feet.
O speak! and restore me the blessing I lost
When I lost you, — my pearl of all pearls beyond cost!
And restore to your own life its youth, and restore
The vision, the rapture, the passion of yore!
Ere our brows had been dimmed in the dust of the world,
When our souls their white wings yet exulting unfurled!
For your eyes rest no more on the unquiet man,
The wild star of whose course its pale orbit outran,
Whom the formless indefinite future of youth,
With its lying allurements, distracted. In truth
I have wearily wandered the world, and I feel
That the least of your lovely regards, O Lucile,
Is worth all the world can afford, and the dream
Which, though followed forever, forever doth seem
As fleeting, and distant, and dim, as of yore
When it brooded in twilight, at dawn, on the shore
Of life's untraversed ocean! I know the sole path
To repose, which my desolate destiny hath,
Is the path by whose course to your feet I return.
And who else, O Lucile, will so truly discern,
And so deeply revere, all the passionate strength,

The sublimity in you, as he whom at length
These have saved from himself, for the truth they reveal
To his worship?"

XVII.

She spoke not; but Alfred could feel
The light hand and arm, that upon him reposed,
Thrill and tremble. Those dark eyes of hers were half closed;
But, under their languid mysterious fringe,
A passionate softness was beaming. One tinge
Of faint inward fire flushed transparently through
The delicate, pallid, and pure olive hue
Of the cheek, half averted and drooped. The rich bosom
Heaved, as when in the heart of a ruffled rose-blossom
A bee is imprisoned and struggles.

XVIII.

Meanwhile
The sun, in his setting, sent up the last smile
Of his power, to baffle the storm. And, behold!
O'er the mountains embattled, his armies, all gold,
Rose and rested: while far up the dim airy crags,
Its artillery silenced, its banners in rags,
The rear of the tempest its sullen retreat
Drew off slowly, receding in silence, to meet
The powers of the night, which, now gathering afar,
Had already sent forward one bright, signal star.
The curls of her soft and luxuriant hair,
From the dark riding-hat, which Lucile used to wear,
Had escaped; and Lord Alfred now covered with kisses
The redolent warmth of those long falling tresses.
Neither he, nor Lucile, felt the rain, which not yet
Had ceased falling around them; when, splashed, drenched, and wet,
The Duc de Luvois down the rough mountain course
Approached them as fast as the road, and his horse,
Which was limping, would suffer. The beast had just now
Lost his footing, and over the perilous brow
Of the storm-haunted mountain his master had thrown;
But the Duke, who was agile, had leaped to a stone,
And the horse, being bred to the instinct which fills
The breast of the wild mountaineer in these hills,
Had scrambled again to his feet; and now master
And horse bore about them the signs of disaster,
As they heavily footed their way through the mist,
The horse with his shoulder, the Duke with his wrist,
Bruised and bleeding.

XIX.

If ever your feet, like my own,
O reader, have traversed these mountains alone,
Have you felt your identity shrink and contract
At the sound of the distant and din cataract,
In the presence of nature's immensities? Say,
Have you hung o'er the torrent, bedewed with its spray,
And, leaving the rock-way, contorted and rolled,
Like a huge couchant Typhon, fold heaped over fold,
Tracked the summits, from which every step that you tread
Rolls the loose stones, with thunder below, to the bed
Of invisible waters, whose mystical sound
Fills with awful suggestions the dizzy profound?
And, laboring onwards, at last through a break
In the walls of the world, burst at once on the lake?

If you have, this description I might have withheld.
You remember how strangely your bosom has swelled

At the vision revealed. On the over-
worked soil
Of this planet, enjoyment is sharpened
by toil;
And one seems, by the pain of ascending
the height,
To have conquered a claim to that won-
derful sight.

XX.

Hail, virginal daughter of cold Espingo!
Hail, Naiad, whose realm is the cloud
and the snow;
For o'er thee the angels have whitened
their wings,
And the thirst of the seraphs is quenched
at thy springs.
What hand hath, in heaven, upheld
thine expanse?
When the breath of creation first fash-
ioned fair France,
Did the Spirit of Ill, in his downthrow
appalling,
Bruise the world, and thus hollow thy
basin while falling?
Ere the mammoth was born hath some
monster unnamed
The base of thy mountainous pedestal
framed?
And later, when Power to Beauty was
wed,
Did some delicate fairy embroider thy
bed
With the fragile valerian and wild col-
umbine?

XXI.

But thy secret thou keepest, and I will
keep mine;
For once gazing on thee, it flashed on
my soul,
All that secret! I saw in a vision the
whole
Vast design of the ages; what was and
shall be!
Hands unseen raised the veil of a great
mystery
For one moment. I saw, and I heard;
and my heart
Bore witness within me to infinite art,
In infinite power proving infinite love;
Caught the great choral chant, marked
the dread pageant move—
The divine Whence and Whither of life!
But, O daughter
Of Oo, not more safe in the deep silent
water
Is thy secret, than mine in my heart.
Even so.
What I then saw and heard, the world
never shall know.

XXII.

The dimness of eve o'er the valleys had
closed,
The rain had ceased falling, the moun-
tains reposed.
The stars had enkindled in luminous
courses
Their slow-sliding lamps, when, re-
mounting their horses,
The riders retraversed that mighty ser-
ration
Of rock-work. Thus left to its own
desolation,
The lake, from whose glimmering limits
the last
Transient pomp of the pageants of sun-
set had passed,
Drew into its bosom the darkness, and
only
Admitted within it one image, — a lonely
And tremulous phantom of flickering
light
That followed the mystical moon through
the night.

XXIII.

It was late when o'er Serchon at last
they descended.
To her châlet, in silence, Lord Alfred
attended
Lucile. As they parted she whispered
him low,
"You have made to me, Alfred, an offer
I know
All the worth of, believe me. I cannot
reply
Without time for reflection. Good night!
— not good by."

"Alas! 't is the very same answer you
made
To the Duc de Luvois but a day since,"
he said.

"No, Alfred! the very same, no," she
replied.
Her voice shook. "If you love me,
obey me.
Abide my answer, to-morrow."

XXIV.

Alas, Cousin Jack!

You Cassandra in breeches and boots! turn your back
To the ruins of Troy. Prophet, seek not for glory
Amongst thine own people.
I follow my story.

CANTO V.

I.

Up!—forth again, Pegasus!—"Many's the slip,"
Hath the proverb well said, "'twixt the cup and the lip!"
How blest should we be, have I often conceived,
Had we really achieved what we nearly achieved!
We but catch at the skirts of the thing we would be,
And fall back on the lap of a false destiny.
So it will be, so has been, since this world began!
And the happiest, noblest, and best part of man
Is the part which he never hath fully played out:
For the first and last word in life's volume is — Doubt.
The face the most fair to our vision allowed
Is the face we encounter and lose in the crowd.
The thought that most thrills our existence is one
Which, before we can frame it in language, is gone.
O Horace! the rustic still rests by the river,
But the river flows on, and flows past him forever!
Who can sit down, and say, . . . "What I will be, I will"?
Who stand up, and affirm . . . "What I was, I am still"?
Who is it that must not, if questioned, say, . . . "What
I would have remained, or become, I am not"?
We are ever behind, or beyond, or beside
Our intrinsic existence. Forever at hide
And seek with our souls. Not in Hades alone
Doth Sisyphus roll, ever frustrate, the stone,
Do the Danaïds ply, ever vainly, the sieve.
Tasks as futile does earth to its denizens give.
Yet there's none so unhappy, but what he hath been
Just about to be happy, at some time, I ween;
And none so beguiled and defrauded by chance,
But what once, in his life, some minute circumstance
Would have fully sufficed to secure him the bliss
Which, missing it then, he forever must miss;
And to most of us, ere we go down to the grave,
Life, relenting, accords the good gift we would have;
But, as though by some strange imperfection in fate,
The good gift, when it comes, comes a moment too late.
The Future's great veil our breath fitfully flaps,
And behind it broods ever the mighty Perhaps.
Yet! there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip;
But while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
Though the cup may next moment be shattered, the wine
Spilt, one deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall be thine,
O being of beauty and bliss! seen and known
In the deeps of my soul, and possessed there alone!
My days know thee not; and my lips name thee never.
Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever.
We have met: we have parted. No more is recorded
In my annals on earth. This alone was afforded
To the man whom men knew me, or deem me, to be.
But, far down, in the depth of my life's mystery,
(Like the siren that under the deep ocean dwells,
Whom the wind as it wails, and the wave as it swells,
Cannot stir in the calm of her coralline halls,

'Mid the world's adamantine and dim pedestals;
At whose feet sit the sylphs and sea fairies; for whom
The almondine glimmers, the soft samphires bloom) —
Thou abidest and reignest forever, O Queen
Of that better world which thou swayest unseen!
My one perfect mistress! my all things in all!
Thee by no vulgar name known to men do I call:
For the seraphs have named thee to me in my sleep,
And that name is a secret I sacredly keep.
But, wherever this nature of mine is most fair,
And its thoughts are the purest — beloved, thou art there!
And whatever is noblest in aught that I do,
Is done to exalt and to worship thee too.
The world gave thee not to me, no! and the world
Cannot take thee away from me now. I have furled
The wings of my spirit about thy bright head;
At thy feet are my soul's immortalities spread.
Thou mightest have been to me much. Thou art more.
And in silence I worship, in darkness adore.
If life be not that which without us we find —
Chance, accident, merely — but rather the mind,
And the soul which, within us, surviveth these things,
If our real existence have truly its springs
Less in that which we do than in that which we feel,
Not in vain do I worship, not hopeless I kneel!
For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,
Thou art mine — and mine only, — O life of my life!
And though many 's the slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,
Yet while o'er the brim of life's beaker I dip,
While there's life on the lip, while there's warmth in the wine,
One deep health I'll pledge, and that health shall be thine!

II.

This world, on whose peaceable breast we repose
Unconvulsed by alarm, once confused in the throes
Of a tumult divine, sea and land, moist and dry,
And in fiery fusion commixed earth and sky.
Time cooled it, and calmed it, and taught it to go
The round of its orbit in peace, long ago.
The wind changeth and whirleth continually:
All the rivers run down and run into the sea:
The wind whirleth about, and is presently stilled:
All the rivers run down, yet the sea is not filled:
The sun goeth forth from his chambers: the sun
Ariseth, and lo! he descendeth anon.
All returns to its place. Use and Habit are powers
Far stronger than Passion, in this world of ours.
The great laws of life readjust their infraction,
And to every emotion appoint a reaction.

III.

Alfred Vargrave had time, after leaving Lucile,
To review the rash step he had taken, and feel
What the world would have called "*his erroneous position.*"
Thought obtruded its claim, and enforced recognition:
Like a creditor who, when the gloss is worn out
On the coat which we once wore with pleasure, no doubt,
Sends us in his account for the garment we bought.
Every spendthrift to passion is debtor to thought.

IV.

He felt ill at ease with himself. He could feel

Little doubt what the answer would be from Lucile.
Her eyes, when they parted, — her voice, when they met,
Still enraptured his heart, which they haunted. And yet,
Though, exulting, he deemed himself loved, where he loved,
Through his mind a vague self-accusation there moved.
O'er his fancy, when fancy was fairest, would rise
The infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That his heart failed within him. In vain did he find
A thousand just reasons for what he had done:
The vision that troubled him would not be gone.
In vain did he say to himself, and with truth,
"Matilda has beauty, and fortune, and youth;
And her heart is too young to have deeply involved
All its hopes in the tie which must now be dissolved.
'T were a false sense of honor in me to suppress
The sad truth which I owe it to her to confess.
And what reason have I to presume this poor life
Of my own, with its languid and frivolous strife,
And without what alone might endear it to her,
Were a boon all so precious, indeed, to confer,
Its withdrawal can wrong her?
"It is not as though
I were bound to some poor village maiden, I know,
Unto whose simple heart mine were all upon earth,
Or to whose simple fortunes my own could give worth.
Matilda, in all the world's gifts, will not miss
Aught that I could procure her. 'T is best as it is!"

V.

In vain did he say to himself, "When I came
To this fatal spot, I had nothing to blame
Or reproach myself for, in the thoughts of my heart.
I could not foresee that its pulses would start
Into such strange emotion on seeing once more
A woman I left with indifference before.
I believed, and with honest conviction believed,
In my love for Matilda. I never conceived
That another could shake it. I deemed I had done
With the wild heart of youth, and looked hopefully on
To the soberer manhood, the worthier life,
Which I sought in the love that I vowed to my wife.
Poor child! she shall learn the whole truth. She shall know
What I knew not myself but a few days ago.
The world will console her, — her pride will support, —
Her youth will renew its emotions. In short,
There is nothing in me that Matilda will miss
When once we have parted. 'T is best as it is!"

VI.

But in vain did he reason and argue. Alas!
He yet felt unconvinced that *'t was* best as it was.
Out of reach of all reason, forever would rise
That infantine face of Matilda, with eyes
So sad, so reproachful, so cruelly kind,
That they harrowed his heart and distracted his mind.

VII.

And then, when he turned from these thoughts to Lucile,
Though his heart rose enraptured, he could not but feel
A vague sense of awe of her nature. Behind
All the beauty of heart, and the graces of mind,
Which he saw and revered in her, something unknown

And unseen in that nature still troubled his own.
He felt that Lucile penetrated and prized
Whatever was noblest and best, though disguised,
In himself; but he did not feel sure that he knew,
Or completely possessed, what, half hidden from view,
Remained lofty and lonely in *her*.
Then, her life,
So untamed, and so free! would she yield as a wife,
Independence, long claimed as a woman? Her name,
So linked by the world with that spurious fame
Which the beauty and wit of a woman assert,
In some measure, alas! to her own loss and hurt
In the serious thoughts of a man! . . . This reflection
O'er the love which he felt cast a shade of dejection,
From which he forever escaped to the thought
Doubt could reach not. . . . "I love her, and all else is naught!"

VIII.

His hand trembled strangely in breaking the seal
Of the letter which reached him at last from Lucile.
At the sight of the very first word that he read,
That letter dropped down from his hand like the dead
Leaf in autumn, that, falling, leaves naked and bare
A desolate tree in a wide wintry air.
He passed his hand hurriedly over his eyes,
Bewildered, incredulous. Angry surprise
And dismay, in one sharp moan, broke from him. Anon
He picked up the page, and read rapidly on.

IX.

The COMTESSE DE NEVERS *to* LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.

"No, Alfred!
"If over the present, when last
We two met, rose the glamour and mist of the past,
It hath now rolled away, and our two paths are plain,
And those two paths divide us.
"That hand which again
Mine one moment has clasped as the hand of a brother,
That hand and your honor are pledged to another!
Forgive, Alfred Vargrave, forgive me, if yet
For that moment (now past!) I have made you forget
What was due to yourself and that other one. Yes,
Mine the fault, and be mine the repentance! Not less,
In now owning this fault, Alfred, let me own, too,
I foresaw not the sorrow involved in it.
"True,
That meeting, which hath been so fatal, I sought,
I alone! But O, deem not it was with the thought
Or your heart to regain, or the past to rewaken.
No! believe me, it was with the firm and unshaken
Conviction, at least, that our meeting would be
Without peril to *you*, although haply to me
The salvation of all my existence.
"I own,
When the rumor first reached me, which lightly made known
To the world your engagement, my heart and my mind
Suffered torture intense. It was cruel to find
That so much of the life of my life, half unknown
To myself, had been silently settled on one
Upon whom but to think it would soon be a crime.
Then I said to myself, 'From the thraldom which time
Hath not weakened there rests but one hope of escape.
That image which Fancy seems ever to shape
From the solitude left round the ruins of yore
Is a phantom. The Being I loved is no more.

What I hear in the silence, and see in the lone
Void of life, is the young hero born of my own
Perished youth: and his image, serene and sublime,
In my heart rests unconscious of change and of time.
Could I see it but once more, as time and as change
Have made it, a thing unfamiliar and strange,
See, indeed, that the Being I loved in my youth
Is no more, and what rests now is only, in truth,
The hard pupil of life and the world: then, O, then,
I should wake from a dream, and my life be again
Reconciled to the world; and, released from regret,
Take the lot fate accords to my choice.'
"So we met.
But the danger I did not foresee has occurred:
The danger, alas, to yourself! I have erred.
But happy for both that this error hath been
Discovered as soon as the danger was seen!
We meet, Alfred Vargrave, no more. I, indeed,
Shall be far from Serchon when this letter you read.
My course is decided; my path I discern:
Doubt is over; my future is fixed now.
"Return,
O return to the young living love! Whence, alas!
If, one moment, you wandered, think only it was
More deeply to bury the past love.
"And, oh!
Believe, Alfred Vargrave, that I, where I go
On my far distant pathway through life, shall rejoice
To treasure in memory all that your voice
Has avowed to me, all in which others have clothed
To my fancy with beauty and worth your betrothed!
In the fair morning light, in the orient dew
Of that young life, now yours, can you fail to renew
All the noble and pure aspirations, the truth,
The freshness, the faith, of your own earnest youth?
Yes! *you* will be happy. I, too, in the bliss
I foresee for you, I shall be happy. And this
Proves me worthy your friendship. And so — let it prove
That I cannot — I do not — respond to your love.
Yes, indeed! be convinced that I could not (no, no,
Never, never!) have rendered you happy. And so,
Rest assured that, if false to the vows you have plighted,
You would have endured, when the first brief, excited
Emotion was o'er, not alone the remorse
Of honor, but also (to render it worse)
Disappointed affection.
"Yes, Alfred; you start?
But think! if the world was too much in your heart,
And too little in mine, when we parted ten years
Ere this last fatal meeting, that time (ay, and tears!)
Have but deepened the old demarcations which then
Placed our natures asunder; and we two again,
As we then were, would still have been strangely at strife.
In that self-independence which is to my life
Its necessity now, as it once was its pride,
Had our course through the world been henceforth side by side,
I should have revolted forever, and shocked,
Your respect for the world's plausibilities, mocked,
Without meaning to do so, and outraged, all those
Social creeds which you live by.
"Oh! do not suppose
That I blame you. Perhaps it is you that are right.
Best, then, all as it is!
"Deem these words life's Good-night

To the hope of a moment: no more!
If there fell
Any tear on this page, 't was a friend's.
"So farewell
To the past — and to you, Alfred Vargrave.
"LUCILE."

X.

So ended that letter.
The room seemed to reel
Round and round in the mist that was scorching his eyes
With a fiery dew. Grief, resentment, surprise,
Half choked him; each word he had read, as it smote
Down some hope, rose and grasped like a hand at his throat,
To stifle and strangle him.
Gasping already
For relief from himself, with a footstep unsteady,
He passed from his chamber. He felt both oppressed
And excited. The letter he thrust in his breast,
And, in search of fresh air and of solitude, passed
The long lime-trees of Serchon. His footsteps at last
Reached a bare narrow heath by the skirts of a wood:
It was sombre and silent, and suited his mood.
By a mineral spring, long unused, now unknown,
Stood a small ruined abbey. He reached it, sat down
On a fragment of stone, 'mid the wild weed and thistle,
And read over again that perplexing epistle.

XI.

In re-reading that letter, there rolled from his mind
The raw mist of resentment which first made him blind
To the pathos breathed through it. Tears rose in his eyes,
And a hope sweet and strange in his heart seemed to rise.
The truth which he saw not the first time he read
That letter, he now saw, — that each word betrayed
The love which the writer had sought to conceal.
His love was received not, he could not but feel,
For one reason alone, — that his love was not free.
True! free yet he was not: but could he not be
Free erelong, free as air to revoke that farewell,
And to sanction his own hopes? he had but to tell
The truth to Matilda, and she were the first
To release him: he had but to wait at the worst.
Matilda's relations would probably snatch
Any pretext, with pleasure, to break off a match
In which they had yielded, alone at the whim
Of their spoiled child, a languid approval to him.
She herself, careless child! was her love for him aught
Save the first joyous fancy succeeding the thought
She last gave to her doll? was she able to feel
Such a love as the love he divined in Lucile?
He would seek her, obtain his release, and, oh! then,
He had but to fly to Lucile, and again
Claim the love which his heart would be free to command.
But to press on Lucile any claim to her hand,
Or even to seek, or to see her, before
He could say, "I am free! free, Lucile, to implore
That great blessing on life you alone can confer,"
'T were dishonor in him, 't would be insult to her.
Thus still with the letter outspread on his knee
He followed so fondly his own revery,
That he felt not the angry regard of a man
Fixed upon him; he saw not a face stern and wan
Turned towards him; he heard not a footstep that passed
And repassed the lone spot where he stood, till at last

A hoarse voice aroused him.
He looked up and saw,
On the bare heath before him, the Duc
de Luvois.

XII.

With aggressive ironical tones, and a
look
Of concentrated insolent challenge, the
Duke
Addressed to Lord Alfred some sneering
allusion
To "the doubtless sublime reveries his
intrusion
Had, he feared, interrupted. Milord
would do better,
He fancied, however, to fold up a letter
The writing of which was too well known,
in fact,
His remark as he passed to have failed
to attract."

XIII.

It was obvious to Alfred the Frenchman
was bent
Upon picking a quarrel! and doubtless
't was meant
From *him* to provoke it by sneers such
as these.
A moment sufficed his quick instinct to
seize
The position. He felt that he could not
expose
His own name, or Lucile's, or Matilda's,
to those
Idle tongues that would bring down
upon him the ban
Of the world, if he now were to fight
with this man.
And indeed, when he looked in the
Duke's haggard face,
He was pained by the change there he
could not but trace.
And he almost felt pity.
He therefore put by
Each remark from the Duke with some
careless reply,
And coldly, but courteously, waving
away
The ill-humor the Duke seemed resolved
to display,
Rose, and turned, with a stern salutation, aside.

XIV.

Then the Duke put himself in the path,
made one stride
In advance, raised a hand, fixed upon
him his eyes,
And said . . .
"Hold, Lord Alfred! Away with
disguise!
I will own that I sought you a moment
ago,
To fix on you a quarrel. I still can do
so
Upon any excuse. I prefer to be frank.
I admit not a rival in fortune or rank
To the hand of a woman, whatever be
hers
Or her suitor's. I love the Comtesse de
Nevers.
I believed, ere you crossed me, and still
have the right
To believe, that she would have been
mine. To her sight
You return, and the woman is suddenly
changed.
You step in between us: her heart is
estranged.
You! who now are betrothed to another,
I know:
You! whose name with Lucile's nearly
ten years ago
Was coupled by ties which you broke:
you! the man
I reproached on the day our acquaintance began:
You! that left her so lightly, — I cannot believe
That you love, as I love, her; nor can
I conceive
You, indeed, have the right so to love
her.
"Milord
I will not thus tamely concede, at your
word,
What, a few days ago, I believed to be
mine!
I shall yet persevere: I shall yet be, in
fine,
A rival you dare not despise. It is plain
That to settle this contest there can but
remain
One way — need I say what it is?"

XV.

Not unmoved
With regretful respect for the earnestness proved
By the speech he had heard, Alfred Vargrave replied
In words which he trusted might yet
turn aside

The quarrel from which he felt bound to abstain,
And, with stately urbanity, strove to explain
To the Duke that he too (a fair rival at worst !)
Had not been accepted.

XVI.

"Accepted ! say first
Are you free to have offered ?"
Lord Alfred was mute.

XVII.

"Ah, you dare not reply !" cried the Duke. "Why dispute,
Why palter with me ? You are silent ! and why ?
Because, in your conscience, you cannot deny
'T was from vanity, wanton and cruel withal,
And the wish an ascendency lost to recall,
That you stepped in between me and her. If, milord,
You be really sincere, I ask only one word.
Say at once you renounce her. At once, on my part,
I will ask your forgiveness with all truth of heart,
And there *can* be no quarrel between us. Say on !"
Lord Alfred grew galled and impatient. This tone
Roused a strong irritation he could not repress.
"You have not the right, sir," he said, "and still less
The power, to make terms and conditions with me.
I refuse to reply."

XVIII.

As diviners may see
Fates they cannot avert in some figure occult,
He foresaw in a moment each evil result
Of the quarrel now imminent.
There, face to face,
'Mid the ruins and tombs of a long-perished race,
With, for witness, the stern Autumn Sky overhead,
And beneath them, unnoticed, the graves, and the dead,
Those two men had met, as it were on the ridge
Of that perilous, narrow, invisible bridge
Dividing the Past from the Future, so small
That, if one should pass over, the other must fall.

XIX.

On the ear, at that moment, the sound of a hoof,
Urged with speed, sharply smote ; and from under the roof
Of the forest in view, where the skirts of it verged
On the heath where they stood, at full gallop emerged
A horseman.
A guide he appeared, by the sash
Of red silk round the waist, and the long leathern lash
With the short wooden handle, slung crosswise behind
The short jacket ; the loose canvas trouser, confined
By the long boots ; the woollen capote ; and the rein,
A mere hempen cord on a curb.
Up the plain
He wheeled his horse, white with the foam on his flank,
Leaped the rivulet lightly, turned sharp from the bank,
And, approaching the Duke, raised his woollen capote,
Bowed low in the selle, and delivered a note.

XX.

The two stood astonished. The Duke, with a gest
Of apology, turned, stretched his hand, and possessed
Himself of the letter, changed color, and tore
The page open, and read.
Ere a moment was o'er
His whole aspect changed. A light rose to his eyes,
And a smile to his lips. While with startled surprise
Lord Alfred yet watched him, he turned on his heel,
And said gayly, "A pressing request from Lucile !

You are quite right, Lord Alfred! fair rivals at worst,
Our relative place may perchance be reversed.
You are not accepted — nor free to propose!
I, perchance, am accepted already; who knows?
I had warned you, milord, I should still persevere.
This letter — but stay! you can read it — look here!"

XXI.

It was now Alfred's turn to feel roused and enraged.
But Lucile to himself was not pledged or engaged
By aught that could sanction resentment. He said
Not a word, but turned round, took the letter, and read . . .

The COMTESSE DE NEVERS *to the* DUC DE LUVOIS.

"SAINT SAVIOUR.

"Your letter, which followed me here, makes me stay
Till I see you again. With no moment's delay
I entreat, I conjure you, by all that you feel
Or profess, to come to me directly.
"LUCILE."

XXII.

"Your letter!" He then had been writing to her!
Coldly shrugging his shoulders, Lord Alfred said, "Sir,
Do not let me detain you!"
The Duke smiled and bowed;
Placed the note in his bosom; addressed, half aloud,
A few words to the messenger: . . .
"Say your despatch
Will be answered ere nightfall"; then glanced at his watch,
And turned back to the Baths.

XXIII.

Alfred Vargrave stood still,
Torn, distracted in heart, and divided in will.
He turned to Lucile's farewell letter to him,
And read over her words; rising tears made them dim;
"*Doubt is over: my future is fixed now*," they said,
"*My course is decided.*" Her course? what! to wed
With this insolent rival! With that thought there shot
Through his heart an acute jealous anguish. But not
Even thus could his clear worldly sense quite excuse
Those strange words to the Duke. She was free to refuse
Himself, free the Duke to accept, it was true:
Even then, though, this eager and strange rendezvous
How imprudent! To some unfrequented lone inn,
And so late (for the night was about to begin) —
She, companionless there! — had she bidden that man?
A fear, vague, and formless, and horrible, ran
Through his heart.

XXIV.

At that moment he looked up, and saw,
Riding fast through the forest, the Duc de Luvois,
Who waved his hand to him, and sped out of sight.
The day was descending. He felt 'twould be night
Ere that man reached Saint Saviour.

XXV.

He walked on, but not
Back toward Serchon: he walked on, but knew not in what
Direction, nor yet with what object, indeed,
He was walking; but still he walked on without heed.

XXVI.

The day had been sullen; but, towards his decline,
The sun sent a stream of wild light up the pine.
Darkly denting the red light revealed at its back,
The old ruined abbey rose roofless and black.

The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven floor
Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of yore,
The site of that refuge where, back to its God
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest
That now preyed on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast
With varying impulse divided and torn,
He traversed the scant heath, and reached the forlorn
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so
He too entered. The light waned around him, and passed
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,
As the last light of day from the high wood declined,
And the great forest sighed its farewell to the beam,
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy grace!
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with him lightly
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly
Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou inclinest,
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor divinest.
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him love thee;
But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot move thee;
And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost thou?
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,
And thou laughest and toyest with any new comer,
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart under
That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!
For all those — the young, and the fair, and the strong,
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and long,
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their deeds
And their days are forgotten! O, hast thou no weeds
And not one year of mourning, — one out of the many
That deck thy new bridals forever, — nor any
Regrets for thy lost loves, concealed from the new,
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these things,
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

"The huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,
And eldrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!
The castle betokens a date long gone by.
He crosses the court-yard with curious eye:
He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet
From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are set;
And the whole place grows wilder and wilder, and less
Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,
Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise,
Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;
Strange epigraphs, blazoned, burn out of the wall:
The spell of a wizard is over it all.
In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping

The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.
If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover
Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover:
If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore
Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.
But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her cheek!
And how sweet must that voice be, if once she would speak!
He looks and he loves her; but knows he (not he!)
The clew to unravel this old mystery?
And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on the wall,
The mute men in armor around him, and all
The weird figures frown, as though striving to say,
'*Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-day!*
And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast
To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possessed
By an Age not thine own!'
"But unconscious is he,
And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see
Aught but *one* form before him!
"Rash, wild words are o'er;
And the vision is vanished from sight evermore!
And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves
O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves
Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.
Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme
Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart."
And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;
Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the young.
And the tale to each heart unto which it is known
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part
From strong physical health, and that vigor of heart
Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,
From a generous vanity native to France,
With the heart of a hunter, whatever the quarry,
Pursued it, too hotly impatient to tarry
Or turn, till he took it. His trophies were trifles:
But trifler he was not. When rose-leaves it rifles,
No less than when oak-trees it ruins, the wind
Its pleasure pursues with impetuous mind.
Both Eugène de Luvois and Lord Alfred had been
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which, seen
Floating faint, in the sunshine of Alfred's soft mood,
Seemed amiable foibles, by Luvois pursued
With impetuous passion, seemed semi-Satanic.
Half pleased you see brooks play with pebbles; in panic
You watch them whirled down by the torrent.
In truth,
To the sacred political creed of his youth
The century which he was born to denied
All realization. Its generous pride
To degenerate protest on all things was sunk;
Its principles each to a prejudice shrunk.
Down the path of a life that led nowhere he trod,
Where his whims were his guides, and his will was his god,
And his pastime his purpose.
From boyhood possessed
Of inherited wealth, he had learned to invest
Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from the cage
Which penury locks, in each vice of an age
All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,
Were to him illegitimate.
Thus, he appeared

To the world what the world chose to have him appear, —
The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere
Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages! Still
'T was this vigor of nature, and tension of will,
That found for the first time — perchance for the last —
In Lucile what they lacked yet to free from the Past,
Force, and faith, in the Future.
And so, in his mind,
To the anguish of losing the woman was joined
The terror of missing his life's destination,
Which in her had its mystical representation.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, passed
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight rode fast.
As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and scares
Some traveller strayed in the waste unawares,
So that thought more than once darkened over his heart
For a moment, and rapidly seemed to depart.
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which rose
Up the shaggy hillside: and the quarrelling crows
Clanged above him, and clustering down the dim air
Dropped into the dark woods. By fits here and there
Shepherd fires faintly gleamed from the valleys. O, how
He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent
From the torrent, — before him a sound from the tracts
Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,
And the loose earth and loose stones rolled momently down
From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.
The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,
And the Powers of the night through the vast solitudes
Walked abroad and conversed with each other. The trees
Were in sound and in motion, and muttered like seas
In Elfland. The road through the forest was hollowed.
On he sped through the darkness, as though he were followed
Fast, fast by the Erl King!
The wild wizard-work
Of the forest at last opened sharp, o'er the fork
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems
Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleamed like gems,
Broke the broad moon above the voluminous
Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!
With his horse reeking white, he at last reached the door
Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,
Through which, ever roaring, there leaped o'er the limb
Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight,
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above
In a glimmering casement a shade seemed to move.
At the door the old negress was nodding her head
As he reached it. "My mistress awaits you," she said.
And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter
He followed her silent. A few moments after,
His heart almost stunned him, his head seemed to reel,
For a door closed — Luvois was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair unconfined
Streaming o'er it, and tossed now and then by the wind
From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a spire
From a brass lamp before her, — a faint hectic fire
On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever.
They seemed to have wept themselves wider than ever,
Those dark eyes, — so dark and so deep ! "You relent ?
And your plans have been changed by the letter I sent ?"
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong inward strife.

LUCILE.

Your letter ! yes, Duke. For it threatens man's life, —
Woman's honor.

LUVOIS.

The last, madam, *not !*

LUCILE.

Both. I glance
At your own words ; blush, son of the knighthood of France,
As I read them ! You say in this letter . . .
"*I know*
Why now you refuse me ; 't is (*is it not so ?*)
For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,
And now trifles again with the heart you deny
To myself. But he shall not ! By man's last wild law,
I will seize on the right (the *right*, Duc de Luvois !)
To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give
To the future its freedom. That man shall not live
To make you as wretched as you have made me !"

LUVOIS.

Well, madam, in those words what word do you see
That threatens the honor of woman ?

LUCILE.

See ! . . . what,
What word, do you ask ? Every word ! would you not,
Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your name
Was soiled and dishonored by more than mere shame
If the woman that bore it had first been the cause
Of the crime which in these words is menaced ? You pause !
Woman's honor, you ask ? Is there, sir, no dishonor
In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,
Can shudder, and say, "In that smile is a grave" ?
No ! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you have
In the contest you menace. That contest but draws
Every right into ruin. By all human laws
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities
Of man's social honor !
The Duke drooped his eyes.
"I obey you," he said, "but let woman beware
How she plays fast and loose thus with human despair,
And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was the right,
When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope quite,
But you should from the first have done this, for I feel
That you knew from the first that I loved you."
Lucile
This sudden reproach seemed to startle.
She raised
A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed
On them silent awhile. His own looks were downcast.
Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was now passed,
Pity crept, and perchance o'er her conscience a tear,
Falling softly, awoke it.
However severe,
Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to her ?
Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,

Which had seemed, even when most impassioned it seemed,
Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she deemed
That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,
So proud of the place the world gave him, held furled
In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide
Might tug, till it snapped, that erect lofty pride?
Were those elements in him, which once roused to strife
Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole life?
There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength of the river
Which through continents pushes its pathway forever
To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.
The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws
The river's life into its own life, by laws
Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is this:
The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore;
Its sources are infinite; still to the shore,
With no diminution of pride, it will say,
"I am here; I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!"
Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,
Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been
Stern or haughty departed; and, humbled in mien,
She approached him, and brokenly murmured, as though
To herself more than him, "Was I wrong? is it so?
Hear me, Duke! you must feel that, whatever you deem
Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem
I may claim on *one* ground, — I at least am sincere.
You say that to me from the first it was clear
That you loved me. But what if this knowledge were known
At a moment in life when I felt most alone,
And least able to be so? A moment, in fact,
When I strove from one haunting regret to retract
And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil
Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you still
So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,
If I hoped to see all this, or deemed that I saw
For a moment the promise of this, in the plighted
Affection of one who, in nature, united
So much that from others affection might claim,
If only affection were free? Do you blame
The hope of that moment? I deemed my heart free
From all, saving sorrow. I deemed that in me
There was yet strength to mould it once more to my will,
To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still
Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain
From hope? alas! I too then hoped!"

LUVOIS.

O, again,
Yet again, say that thrice-blessèd word! say, Lucile,
That you then deigned to hope —

LUCILE.

Yes! to hope I could feel,
And could give to you, that without which, all else given
Were but to deceive, and to injure you even: —

A heart free from thoughts of another.
Say, then,
Do you blame that one hope?

LUVOIS.

O Lucile!

"Say again,"
She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,
"Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own
To my heart that the hope it had cherished was o'er,
And forever, I said to you then, 'Hope no more'?
I myself hoped no more!"
With but ill-suppressed wrath
The Duke answered . . . "What, then! he recrosses your path
This man, and you have but to see him, despite
Of his troth to another, to take back that light
Worthless heart to your own, which he wronged years ago!"
Lucile faintly, brokenly murmured, . . .
"No! no!
'T is not that — but alas! — but I cannot conceal
That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel
That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part, —
In return for what . . . ah, Duke, what is it? . . . a heart
Which is only a ruin!"
With words warm and wild,
"Though a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild
And restore it," Luvois cried; "though ruined it be,
Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!"
He approached her. She shrank back. The grief in her eyes
Answered, "No!"
An emotion more fierce seemed to rise
And to break into flame, as though fired by the light
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaimed,
"Am I right?
You reject *me!* accept *him?*"
"I have not done so,"
She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed,
"Not yet, — no!
But can you with accents as firm promise me
That you will not accept him?"
"Accept? Is he free?
Free to offer?" she said.
"You evade me, Lucile,"
He replied; "ah, you will not avow what you feel!
He might make himself free? O, you blush, — turn away!
Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!
While you deign to reply to one question from me?
I may hope not, you tell me: but tell me, may he?
What! silent? I alter my question. If quite
Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then?"
"He might,"
She said softly.

VI.

Those two whispered words, in his breast,
As he heard them, in one maddening moment releast
All that 's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush
And extinguish in man all that 's good. In the rush
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste
And darken and devastate intellect, chased
From its realm human reason. The wild animal
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to pierce
And to rend, rushed upon him; fierce jealousy, swelled
By all passions bred from it, and ever impelled
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,
And on others inflict its own pangs!
At that minute
What passed through his mind, who shall say? who may tell
The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red glare of hell
Can illumine alone?

He stared wildly around
That lone place, so lonely! That silence! no sound
Reached that room, through the dark evening air, save the drear
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near!
It was midnight all round on the weird silent weather;
Deep midnight in him! They two, — lone and together,
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him!
The triumph and bliss of his rival flashed o'er him.
The abyss of his own black despair seemed to ope
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope
Which Dante read over the city of doom.
All the Tarquin passed into his soul in the gloom,
And, uttering words he dared never recall,
Words of insult and menace, he thundered down all
The brewed storm-cloud within him: its flashes scorched blind
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control;
A torrent seemed loosened within him. His soul
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hissed
And seethed in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had missed
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place
Where he rested o'erawed: a saint's scorn on her face;
Such a dread *vade retro* was written in light
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that sight,
Have sunk back abashed to perdition. I know
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had looked so,
She had needed no dagger next morning. She rose
And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is gone,
And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.
There she paused; and, as though from immeasurable,
Insurpassable distance, she murmured — "Farewell!
We, alas! have mistaken each other. Once more
Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.
Duc de Luvois, adieu!"
From the heart-breaking gloom
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,
He felt she was gone, — gone forever!

IX.

No word,
The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen accusation
As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,
In which he remained.
"O, return; I repent!"
He exclaimed; but no sound through the stillness was sent,
Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet hummed her night-hymn:
An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning prayer.
"Return," sung the wandering insect. The roar
Of the waters replied, "Nevermore! nevermore!"
He walked to the window. The spray on his brow
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water below;
The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound
Of the torrent. The mountains gloomed sullenly round.
A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.
O'er the dim balustrade all bewildered he hung,
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink

Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and listing
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquished
His unconscious employment, that light was extinguished.
Wheels, at last, from the inn door aroused him. He ran
Down the stairs; reached the door — just to see her depart.
Down the mountain the carriage was speeding.

X.

His heart
Pealed the knell of its last hope. He rushed on; but whither
He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the shelf
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself!
Till, exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and moss
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside. He sank
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them. He knew
That the night had divided his whole life in two.
Behind him a Past that was over forever;
Before him a Future devoid of endeavor
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,
Of the other a fear. What remained to be done?
Whither now should he turn? Turn again, as before,
To his old easy, careless existence of yore
He could not. He felt that for better or worse
A change had passed o'er him; an angry remorse
Of his own frantic failure and error had marred
Such a refuge forever. The future seemed barred
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread
To attain it. Life's wilderness round him was spread.
What clew there to cling by?
He clung by a name
To a dynasty fallen forever. He came
Of an old princely house, true through change to the race
And the sword of Saint Louis, — a faith 't were disgrace
To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneeled
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard field,
With the Crescent) become, ere it reached him, tradition;
A mere faded badge of a social position;
A thing to retain and say nothing about,
Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from doubt.
Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of his youth
Wholly failed the strong needs of his manhood, in truth!
And beyond them, what region of refuge? what field
For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,
In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?
Blind deliriums, bewildered and endless distraction!
Not even a desert, not even the cell
Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell
The wild devil-instincts which now, unrepresst,
Ran riot through that ruined world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight
Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of night
O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There
As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him prayer;
But what had he to pray to?
The winds in the woods

The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,
Were in commune all round with the invisible Power
That walked the dim world by Himself at that hour.
But their language he had not yet learned — in despite
Of the much he *had* learned — or forgotten it quite,
With its once native accents. Alas! what had he
To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony
Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence. His will,
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild
At its work of destruction within him. The child
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,
His own devil.
He sat on the damp mountain sod,
And stared sullenly up at the dark sky. The clouds
Had heaped themselves over the bare west in crowds
Of misshapen, incongruous portents. A green
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge
Of the grim world, gleamed ghastly, as under some bridge,
Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown
And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands
Dismantled and rent; and revealed, through a loop
In the breached dark, the blemished and half-broken hoop
Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,
Darkened round him. One object alone — that gray cross —
Glimmered faint on the dark. Gazing up, he descried
Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretched wide,
As though to embrace him.
He turned from the sight,
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light
Of the dawn grayly flickered and glared on the spent
Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent
To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,
He was sullenly riding across the dark forest
Toward Serchon.
Thus riding, with eyes of defiance
Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance
With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived
Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-leaved
Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his way,
The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray
With the gray glare of morning. Eugène de Luvois,
With the sense of a strange second-sight, when he saw
That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,
By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes
Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,
With a stern sad inquiry fixed keenly on him.
And, to meet it, a lie leaped at once to his own;
A lie born of that lying darkness now grown
Over all in his nature! He answered that gaze
With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys
More intensely than words what a man means, conveyed
Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which said,
"I have triumphed. The question your eyes would imply
Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!"

And so he rode by,
And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,
By one wild hope impelled, by one wild fear pursued,
And led by one instinct, which seemed to exclude
From his mind every human sensation, save one —
The torture of doubt — had strayed moodily on,
Down the highway deserted, that evening in which
With the Duke he had parted; strayed on, through the rich
Haze of sunset, or into the gradual night,
Which darkened, unnoticed, the land from his sight,
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect of all
The wild scenery round him avail to recall
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had hung
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipped on fire from among
The rent vapors, and sunk o'er the ridge of the world.
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him unfurled,
In one moment of splendor, the leagues of dark trees,
And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the face
Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the place
Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This same track
The Duke must have traversed, perforce, to get back
To Serchon; not yet then the Duke had returned!
He listened, he looked up the dark, but discerned
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.
He knew that the night was approaching to day.
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and forlorn,
Revealed to him, riding toward Serchon, the Duke.
'T was then that the two men exchanged look for look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rushed on. He tore
His path through the thicket. He reached the inn door,
Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubbed his eyes.
The Countess was gone. And the Duke? The man stared
A sleepy inquiry.
With accents that scared
The man's dull sense awake, "He, the stranger," he cried,
"Who had been there that night!"
The man grinned and replied,
With a vacant intelligence, "He, O ay, ay!
He went after the lady."
No further reply
Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no more,
Flung a coin to the man, and so turned from the door.
"What! the Duke then the night in that lone inn had passed?
In that lone inn — with her!" Was that look he had cast
When they met in the forest, that look which remained
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explained?

XVII.

The day was half turned to the evening, before

He re-entered Serchon, with a heart sick and sore.
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,
By their voices attracted, distinguished the Duke,
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous. Right
Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift sombre stride,
Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turned, stepped aside,
And, cordially grasping his hand, whispered low,
"O, how right have you been! There can never be — no,
Never — any more contest between us! Milord,
Let us henceforth be friends!"
Having uttered that word,
He turned lightly round on his heel, and again
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that train
Of his young imitators.
Lord Alfred stood still,
Rooted, stunned to the spot. He felt weary and ill,
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the soul,
With a dull, stifling anguish he could not control.
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the crowd,
The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud
Some comment upon his gay humor that day?
He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?
'T is, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune,
Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn
Has at last found a Mars, — who, of course, shall be nameless,
The vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blameless!
Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs
All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucile de Nevers
With the Duke's coupled gayly, in some laughing, light,
Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did there roll
Back again, back again, on its smooth downward course
O'er his nature, with gathered momentum and force,
THE WORLD.

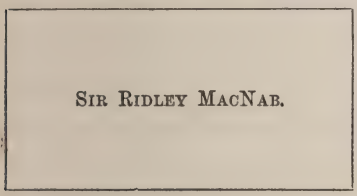
XIX.

"No!" he muttered, "she cannot have sinned!
True! women there are (self-named women of mind!)
Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes!
To choose and to leave — than the legalized stress
Of the lovingest marriage. But she — is she so?
I will not believe it. Lucile? O no, no!
Not Lucile!
"But the world? and, ah, what would it say?
O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!
The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!
She is right! no, we could not be happy.
'T is best
As it is. I will write to her, — write, O my heart!
And accept her farewell. *Our* farewell! must we part, —
Part thus, then, — forever, Lucile? Is it so?
Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.
'T was a dream! we must waken!"

XX.

With head bowed, as though
By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow
Moody footsteps, he turned to his inn.
Drawn apart
From the gate, in the court-yard, and ready to start,

Postboys mounted, portmanteaus packed up and made fast,
A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he passed.
He ordered his horse to be ready anon :
Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly passed on,
And ascended the staircase, and entered his room.
It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom
Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light,
On the mantel-piece ; there a large card caught his sight, —
A large card, a stout card, well printed and plain,
Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.
It gave a respectable look to the slab
That it lay on. The name was —



Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,
For 't was that of his own future uncle-in-law,
Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known
As wearing the longest-phylacteried gown
Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of ;
A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the most of
This world and the next ; having largely invested
Not only where treasure is never molested
By thieves, moth, or rust ; but on this earthly ball
Where interest was high, and security small,
Of mankind there was never a theory yet
Not by some individual instance upset :
And so to that sorrowful verse of the Psalm
Which declares that the wicked expand like the palm
In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,
A cheering exception did Ridley present.
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prospered his piety.
The leader of every religious society,
Christian knowledge he labored through life to promote
With personal profit, and knew how to quote
Both the Stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,
A waiter his head through the doorway protruded ;
"Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wished to speak."
Alfred Vargrave could feel there were tears on his cheek ;
He brushed them away with a gesture of pride.
He glanced at the glass ; when his own face he eyed,
He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said,
"Sir Ridley may enter."
In three minutes more
That benign apparition appeared at the door.
Sir Ridley, released for a while from the cares
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,
In company there with his sister and niece,
Found himself now at Serchon, — distributing tracts,
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts
For Exeter Hall ; he was starting that night
For Bigorre : he had heard, to his cordial delight,
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting out

For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!
Here some commonplace compliments as to "the marriage"
Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage
Was ready. A storm seemed to threaten the weather:
If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down
Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause
And a slight hesitation, the which seemed to cause
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answered, — "My dear
Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here —
Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair
Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare
My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),
Before I accept your kind offer."
"Why not?"
Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before
Sir Ridley observed it, had passed through the door.
A few moments later, with footsteps revealing
Intense agitation of uncontrolled feeling,
He was rapidly pacing the garden below.
What passed through his mind then is more than I know.
But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,
In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread
Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face
Betrayed there the least agitation. "The place
You so kindly have offered," he said, "I accept."
And he stretched out his hand. The two travellers stepped
Smiling into the carriage.
And thus, out of sight,
They drove down the dark road, and into the night.

XXII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,
"We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!"
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply with us.
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two men
Began to converse, somewhat drowsily, when
Alfred suddenly thought, — "Here's a man of ripe age,
At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,
Who looks happy, and therefore who must have been wise:
Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes
Some few of the reasons which make me believe
That I neither am happy nor wise? 't would relieve
And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and doubt."
For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.
It was snapped up at once.
"What is truth?" jesting Pilate
Asked, and passed from the question at once with a smile at
Its utter futility. Had he addressed it
To Ridley MacNab, he at least had confessed it
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man
Could more promptly have answered the sceptical Roman
Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,
And forthwith on the pavement he 'll sketch you the scheme
Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his theme!
Not afraid of La Place, nor of Arago, he!
He 'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.
Here 's your sun, — call him A; B 's the moon; it is clear
How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask La Place,

(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to face !)
Their science in plain A B C to accord
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends ! not a word
Will you get for your pains from their sad lips. Alas !
Not a drop from the bottle that 's quite full will pass.
'T is the half-empty vessel that freest emits
The water that 's in it. 'T is thus with men's wits ;
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability
Of imparting to others a truth with facility
Is proportioned forever with painful exactness
To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight
Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate
More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,
And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms ;
But if every street charity shook an investment,
Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vestment,
The length of the process would limit the act ;
And therefore the truth that 's summed up in a tract
Is most lightly dispensed.
As for Alfred, indeed,
On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffered to feed
By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,
That the two men thus talking continued to go
Onward somehow, together, — on into the night, —
The midnight, — in which they escape from our sight.

XXIII.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its place,
And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy space
Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of sight,
To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night ;
And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,
In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.
And the world laughed.
It wanted but two rosy hours
From the noon, when they passed through the thick passion-flowers
Of the little wild garden that dimpled before
The small house where their carriage now stopped, at Bigorre.
And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the dew,
With her white morning robe flitting joyously through
The dark shrubs with which the soft hillside was clothed,
Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his betrothed.
Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,
That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.
And he murmured, or sighed, "O, how could I have strayed
From this sweet child, or suffered in aught to invade
Her young claim on my life, though it were for an hour,
The thought of another ?"
"Look up, my sweet flower !"
He whispered her softly, "my heart unto thee
Is returned, as returns to the rose the wild bee !"
"And will wander no more ?" laughed Matilda.
"No more,"
He repeated. And, low to himself, "Yes, 't is o'er !
My course, too, is decided, Lucile ! Was I blind
To have dreamed that these clever French-women of mind
Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,
Or sympathize with it ?"

XXIV.

And here the first part
Of this drama is over. The curtain falls furled
On the actors within it, — the Heart and the World.
Wooed and wooer have played with the riddle of life, —
Have they solved it?
Appear! answer, Husband and Wife!

XXV.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

The COMTESSE DE NEVERS *to a* FRIEND IN INDIA.

"Once more, O my friend, to your arms and your heart,
And the places of old . . . never, never to part!
Once more to the palm and the fountain! Once more
To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of yore!
From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret
Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set;
From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,
There is no strength to bear them, — old Time is *so* old!
From the world's weary masters, that come upon earth
Sapped and mined by the fever they bear from their birth;
From the men of small stature, mere parts of a crowd,
Born too late, when the strength of the world hath been bowed;
Back, — back to the Orient, from whose sunbright womb
Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the bloom
And the beauty of times that are faded forever!
To the palms! to the tombs! to the still Sacred River!
Where I too, the child of a day that is done,
First leapt into life, and looked up at the sun.
Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home
I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come!
Are the three intense stars, that we watched night by night
Burning broad on the band of Orion, as bright?
Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,
When, as children, we gathered the moonbeams for gold?
Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still
Remember the free games we played on the hill,
'Mid those huge stones upheaped, where we recklessly trod
O'er the old ruined fane of the old ruined god?
How he frowned, while around him we carelessly played!
That frown on my life ever after hath stayed,
Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast
From some vague supernatural grief in the past.
For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he frowned,
To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had found,
In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss
Which his science divine seemed divinely to miss.
Alas! you may haply remember me yet
The free child, whose glad childhood myself I forget.
I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest:
I bear to you only a laboring breast:
My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurled
O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a world:
The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:
It is flown, and returns not, though many a day
Have I watched from the windows of life for its coming.
Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.
I know not what Ararat rises for me
Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:

I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,
Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills :
But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my breast
Wakes and whispers me on — to the East ! to the East !
Shall I find the child's heart that I left there ? or find
The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of mind ?
Alas ! who shall number the drops of the rain ?
Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again ?
Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent ?
Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent ?
To a voice who shall render an image ? or who
From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew ?
I have burned out within me the fuel of life
Wherefore lingers the flame ? Rest is sweet after strife.
I would sleep for a while. I am weary.
" My friend,
I had meant in these lines to regather, and send
To our old home, my life's scattered links. But 't is vain !
Each attempt seems to shatter the chaplet again ;
Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,
Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore
Whence too far I have wandered.
" How many long years
Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching tears,
While I wrote to you, splashed out a girl's premature
Moans of pain at what women in silence endure !
To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes alone,
That now long-faded page of my life hath been shown
Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you know,
Many years since, — how many !
" A few months ago
I seemed reading it backward, that page ! Why explain
Whence or how ? The old dream of my life rose again.
The old superstition ! the idol of old !
It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould
Is not to the forest more lost than to me
That emotion. I bury it here by the sea
Which will bear me anon far away from the shore
Of a land which my footsteps shall visit no more.
And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.
Hark ! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the wave,
Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home !
I come, O you whispering voices, I come!
My friend, ask me nothing.
" Receive me alone
As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone
In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring :
It may be an angel that, weary of wing,
Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,
Or only a wayfarer strayed in the gloom.
This only I know : that in Europe at least
Lives the craft or the power that must master our East.
Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves yield at last ?
Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.
The gods of the household Time thrusts from the shelf ;
And I seem as unreal and weird to myself
As those idols of old.
" Other times, other men,
Other men, other passions !
" So be it ! yet again
I turn to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,
And the light of those lands where the great sun is born !
Spread your arms, O my friend ! on your breast let me feel
The repose which hath fled from my own.
" Your LUCILE."

PART II.

CANTO I.

I.

HAIL, Muse! But each Muse by this time has, I know,
Been used up, and Apollo has bent his own bow
All too long; so I leave unassaulted the portal
Of Olympus, and only invoke here a mortal.

Hail, Murray! — not Lindley, — but Murray and Son.
Hail, omniscient, beneficent, great Two-in-One!
In Albemarle Street may thy temple long stand!
Long enlightened and led by thine erudite hand,
May each novice in science nomadic unravel
Statistical mazes of modernized travel!
May each inn-keeping knave long thy judgments revere,
And the postboys of Europe regard thee with fear;
While they feel, in the silence of baffled extortion,
That knowledge is power! Long, long, like that portion
Of the national soil which the Greek exile took
In his baggage wherever he went, may thy book
Cheer each poor British pilgrim, who trusts to thy wit
Not to pay through his nose just for following it!
Mayst thou long, O instructor! preside o'er his way,
And teach him alike what to praise and to pay!
Thee, pursuing this pathway of song, once again
I invoke, lest, unskilled, I should wander in vain.
To my call be propitious, nor, churlish, refuse
Thy great accents to lend to the lips of my Muse;
For I sing of the Naiads who dwell 'mid the stems
Of the green linden-trees by the waters of Ems.
Yes! thy spirit descends upon mine, O John Murray!
And I start — with thy book — for the Baths in a hurry.

II.

"At Coblentz a bridge of boats crosses the Rhine;
And from thence the road, winding by Ehrenbreitstein,
Passes over the frontier of Nassau. ("N. B.
No custom-house here since the Zollverein." See
Murray, paragraph 30.)
"The route, at each turn,
Here the lover of nature allows to discern,
In varying prospect, a rich wooded dale:
The vine and acacia-tree mostly prevail
In the foliage observable here; and, moreover,
The soil is carbonic. The road, under cover
Of the grape-clad and mountainous upland that hems
Round this beautiful spot, brings the traveller to — "EMS.
A schnellpost from Frankfort arrives every day.
At the Kurhaus (the old Ducal mansion) you pay
Eight florins for lodgings. A Restaurateur
Is attached to the place; but most travellers prefer
(Including, indeed, many persons of note)
To dine at the usual-priced table d'hôte.
Through the town runs the Lahn, the steep green banks of which
Two rows of white picturesque houses enrich;
And between the high road and the river is laid
Out a sort of a garden, called 'THE Promenade.'

Female visitors here, who may make up their mind
To ascend to the top of these mountains, will find
On the banks of the stream, saddled all the day long,
Troops of donkeys — sure-footed — proverbially strong " ;
And the traveller at Ems may remark, as he passes,
Here, as elsewhere, the women run after the asses.

III.

'Mid the world's weary denizens bound for these springs
In the month when the merle on the maple-bough sings,
Pursued to the place from dissimilar paths
By a similar sickness, there came to the baths
Four sufferers, — each stricken deep through the heart,
Or the head, by the self-same invisible dart
Of the arrow that flieth unheard in the noon,
From the sickness that walketh unseen in the moon,
Through this great lazaretto of life, wherein each
Infects with his own sores the next within reach.
First of these were a young English husband and wife,
Grown weary ere half through the journey of life.
O Nature, say where, thou gray mother of earth,
Is the strength of thy youth ? that thy womb brings to birth
Only old men to-day ! On the winds, as of old,
Thy voice in its accent is joyous and bold ;
Thy forests are green as of yore ; and thine oceans
Yet move in the might of their ancient emotions :
But man — thy last birth and thy best — is no more
Life's free lord, that looked up to the starlight of yore,
With the faith on the brow, and the fire in the eyes,
The firm foot on the earth, the high heart in the skies ;
But a gray-headed infant, defrauded of youth,
Born too late or too early.
The lady, in truth,
Was young, fair, and gentle ; and never was given
To more heavenly eyes the pure azure of heaven.
Never yet did the sun touch to ripples of gold
Tresses brighter than those which her soft hand unrolled
From her noble and innocent brow, when she rose,
An Aurora, at dawn, from her balmy repose,
And into the mirror the bloom and the blush
Of her beauty broke, glowing ; like light in a gush
From the sunrise in summer.
Love, roaming, shall meet
But rarely a nature more sound or more sweet —
Eyes brighter — brows whiter — a figure more fair —
Or lovelier lengths of more radiant hair —
Than thine, Lady Alfred ! And here I aver
(May those that have seen thee declare if I err)
That not all the oysters in Britain contain
A pearl pure as thou art.
Let some one explain, —
Who may know more than I of the intimate life
Of the pearl with the oyster, — why yet in his wife,
In despite of her beauty — and most when he felt
His soul to the sense of her loveliness melt —
Lord Alfred missed something he sought for : indeed,
The more that he missed it the greater the need ;
Till it seemed to himself he could willingly spare
All the charms that he found for the one charm not there.

IV.

For the blessings Life lends us, it strictly demands

The worth of their full usufruct at our hands.
And the value of all things exists, not indeed
In themselves, but man's use of them, feeding man's need.

Alfred Vargrave, in wedding with beauty and youth,
Had embraced both Ambition and Wealth. Yet in truth
Unfulfilled the ambition, and sterile the wealth

(In a life paralyzed by a moral ill-health),
Had remained, while the beauty and youth, unredeemed
From a vague disappointment at all things, but seemed
Day by day to reproach him in silence for all
That lost youth in himself they had failed to recall.
No career had he followed, no object obtained
In the world by those worldly advantages gained
From nuptials beyond which once seemed to appear,
Lit by love, the broad path of a brilliant career.
All that glittered and gleamed through the moonlight of youth
With a glory so fair, now that manhood in truth
Grasped and gathered it, seemed like that false fairy gold
Which leaves in the hand only moss, leaves, and mould!

V.

Fairy gold! moss and leaves! and the young Fairy Bride?
Lived there yet fairy-lands in the face at his side?
Say, O friend, if at evening thou ever hast watched
Some pale and impalpable vapor, detached
From the dim and disconsolate earth, rise and fall
O'er the light of a sweet serene star, until all
The chilled splendor reluctantly waned in the deep
Of its own native heaven? Even so seemed to creep
O'er that fair and ethereal face, day by day,
While the radiant vermeil, subsiding away,
Hid its light in the heart, the faint gradual veil
Of a sadness unconscious.
The lady grew pale
As silent her lord grew: and both, as they eyed
Each the other askance, turned, and secretly sighed.
Ah, wise friend, what avails all experience can give?
True, we know what life is — but, alas! do we live?
The grammar of life we have gotten by heart,
But life's self we have made a dead language, — an art,
Not a voice. Could we speak it, but once, as 't was spoken
When the silence of passion the first time was broken!
Cuvier knew the world better than Adam, no doubt:
But the last man, at best, was but learnéd about
What the first, without learning, *enjoyed*. What art thou
To the man of to-day, O Leviathan, now?
A science. What wert thou to him that from ocean
First beheld thee appear? A surprise, — an emotion!
When life leaps in the veins, when it beats in the heart,
When it thrills as it fills every animate part,
Where lurks it? how works it? . . . we scarcely detect it.
But life goes: the heart dies: haste, O leech, and dissect it!
This accurséd æsthetical, ethical age
Hath so fingered life's hornbook, so blurred every page,
That the old glad romance, the gay chivalrous story,
With its fables of faery, its legends of glory,
Is turned to a tedious instruction, not new
To the children that read it insipidly through.
We know too much of Love ere we love. We can trace
Nothing new, unexpected, or strange in his face
When we see it at last. 'T is the same little Cupid,
With the same dimpled cheek, and the smile almost stupid,
We have seen in our pictures, and stuck on our shelves,
And copied a hundred times over, ourselves.
And wherever we turn, and whatever we do,
Still, that horrible sense of the *déjà connu!*

VI.

Perchance 't was the fault of the life that they led ;
Perchance 't was the fault of the novels they read ;
Perchance 't was a fault in themselves ; I am bound not
To say : this I know — that these two creatures found not
In each other some sign they expected to find
Of a something unnamed in the heart or the mind ;
And, missing it, each felt a right to complain
Of a sadness which each found no word to explain.
Whatever it was, the world noticed not it
In the light-hearted beauty, the light-hearted wit.
Still, as once with the actors in Greece, 't is the case,
Each must speak to the crown with a mask on his face.
Praise followed Matilda wherever she went.
She was flattered. Can flattery purchase content ?
Yes. While to its voice, for a moment, she listened,
The young cheek still bloomed, and the soft eyes still glistened ;
And her lord, when, like one of those light vivid things
That glide down the gauzes of summer with wings
Of rapturous radiance, unconscious she moved
Through that buzz of inferior creatures, which proved
Her beauty, their envy, one moment forgot
'Mid the many charms there, the one charm that was not :
And when o'er her beauty enraptured he bowed,
(As they turned to each other, each flushed from the crowd,)
And murmured those praises which yet seemed more dear
Than the praises of others had grown to her ear,
She, too, ceased awhile her own fate to regret :
" Yes ! . . . he loves me," she sighed ;
" this is love, then, — and *yet* — *!* "

VII.

Ah, that *yet !* fatal word ! 't is the moral of all
Thought and felt, seen or done, in this world since the Fall !
It stands at the end of each sentence we learn ;
It flits in the vista of all we discern ;
It leads us, for ever and ever, away
To find in to-morrow what flies with to-day.
'T was this same little fatal and mystical word
That now, like a mirage, led my lady and lord
To the waters of Ems from the waters of Marah ;
Drooping pilgrims in Fashion's blank, arid Sahara !

VIII.

At the same time, pursued by a spell much the same,
To these waters two other worn pilgrims there came :
One a man, one a woman : just now, at the latter,
As the Reader I mean by and by to look at her
And judge for himself, I will not even glance.

IX.

Of the self-crowned young kings of the Fashion in France
Whose resplendent regalia so dazzled the sight,
Whose horse was so perfect, whose boots were so bright,
Who so hailed in the salon, so marked in the Bois,
Who so welcomed by all, as Eugène de Luvois ?
Of all the smooth-browed premature debauchees
In that town of all towns, where Debauchery sees
On the forehead of youth her mark everywhere graven, —
In Paris I mean, — where the streets are all paven
By those two fiends whom Milton saw bridging the way
From Hell to this planet, — who, haughty and gay,
The free rebel of life, bound or led by no law,

Walked that causeway as bold as Eugène de Luvois ?
Yes ! he marched through the great masquerade, loud of tongue,
Bold of brow : but the motley he masked in, it hung
So loose, trailed so wide, and appeared to impede
So strangely at times the vexed effort at speed,
That a keen eye might guess it was made — not for him,
But some brawler more stalwart of stature and limb.
That it irked him, in truth, you at times could divine,
For when low was the music, and spilt was the wine,
He would clutch at the garment, as though it oppressed
And stifled some impulse that choked in his breast.

X.

What ! he, . . . the light sport of his frivolous ease !
Was he, too, a prey to a mortal disease ?
My friend, hear a parable : ponder it well :
For a moral there is in the tale that I tell.
One evening I sat in the Palais Royal,
And there, while I laughed at Grassot and Arnal,
My eye fell on the face of a man at my side ;
Every time that he laughed I observed that he sighed,
As though vexed to be pleased. I remarked that he sat
Ill at ease on his seat, and kept twirling his hat
In his hand, with a look of unquiet abstraction.
I inquired the cause of his dissatisfaction.
"Sir," he said, "if what vexes me here you would know,
Learn that, passing this way some few half-hours ago,
I walked into the Français, to look at Rachel.
(Sir, that woman in Phèdre is a miracle !) — Well,
I asked for a box : they were occupied all :
For a seat in the balcony : all taken ! a stall :
Taken too : the whole house was as full as could be, —
Not a hole for a rat ! I had just time to see
The lady I love *tête-à-tête* with a friend
In a box out of reach at the opposite end :
Then the crowd pushed me out. What was left me to do ?
I tried for the tragedy . . . *que voulez-vous ?*
Every place for the tragedy booked ! . . . *mon ami,*
The farce was close by : . . . at the farce *me voici !*
The piece is a new one : and Grassot plays well :
There is drollery, too, in that fellow Ravel :
And Hyacinth's nose is superb ! . . . Yet I meant
My evening elsewhere, and not thus, to have spent.
Fate orders these things by her will, not by ours !
Sir, mankind is the sport of invisible powers."

I once met the Duc de Luvois for a moment ;
And I marked, when his features I fixed in my comment,
O'er those features the same vague disquietude stray
I had seen on the face of my friend at the play ;
And I thought that he too, very probably, spent
His evenings not wholly as first he had meant.

XI.

O source of the holiest joys we inherit,
O Sorrow, thou solemn, invisible spirit !
Ill fares it with man when, through life's desert sand,
Grown impatient too soon for the long-promised land
He turns from the worship of thee, as thou art,
An expressless and imageless truth in the heart,
And takes of the jewels of Egypt, the pelf
And the gold of the Godless, to make to himself

A gaudy, idolatrous image of thee,
And then bows to the sound of the cymbal the knee.
The sorrows we make to ourselves are false gods:
Like the prophets of Baal, our bosoms with rods
We may smite, we may gash at our hearts till they bleed,
But these idols are blind, deaf, and dumb to our need.
The land is athirst, and cries out! . . . 't is in vain;
The great blessing of Heaven descends not in rain.

XII.

It was night; and the lamps were beginning to gleam
Through the long linden-trees, folded each in his dream,
From that building which looks like a temple . . . and is
The Temple of — Health? Nay, but enter! I wis
That never the rosy-hued deity knew
One votary out of that sallow-cheeked crew
Of Courlanders, Wallacs, Greeks, affable Russians,
Explosive Parisians, potato-faced Prussians;
Jews — Hamburghers chiefly; — pure patriots, — Suabians; —
"Cappadocians and Elamites, Cretes and Arabians,
And the dwellers in Pontus" . . . My muse will not weary
More lines with the list of them . . . *cur fremuere?*
What is it they murmur, and mutter, and hum?
Into what Pandemonium is Pentecost come?
O, what is the name of the god at whose fane
Every nation is mixed in so motley a train?
What weird Kabala lies on those tables outspread?
To what oracle turns with attention each head?
What holds these pale worshippers each so devout,
And what are those hierophants busied about?

XIII.

Here passes, repasses, and flits to and fro,
And rolls without ceasing the great Yes and No:
Round this altar alternate the weird Passions dance,
And the God worshipped here is the old God of Chance.
Through the wide-open doors of the distant saloon
Flute, hautboy, and fiddle are squeaking in tune;
And an indistinct music forever is rolled,
That mixes and chimes with the chink of the gold,
From a vision, that flits in a luminous haze,
Of figures forever eluding the gaze;
It fleets through the doorway, it gleams on the glass,
And the weird words pursue it — *Rouge, Impair, et Passe!*
Like a sound borne in sleep through such dreams as encumber
With haggard emotions the wild wicked slumber
Of some witch when she seeks, through a nightmare, to grab at
The hot hoof of the fiend, on her way to the Sabbat.

XIV.

The Duc de Luvois and Lord Alfred had met
Some few evenings ago (for the season as yet
Was but young) in this self-same Pavilion of Chance.
The idler from England, the idler from France
Shook hands, each, of course, with much cordial pleasure:
An acquaintance at Ems is to most men a treasure,
And they both were too well-bred in aught to betray
One discourteous remembrance of things passed away.
'T was a sight that was pleasant, indeed, to be seen,
These friends exchange greetings; — the men who had been
Foes so nearly in days that were past.
This, no doubt,
Is why, on the night I am speaking about,

My Lord Alfred sat down by himself at roulette,
Without one suspicion his bosom to fret,
Although he had left, with his pleasant French friend,
Matilda, half vexed, at the room's farthest end.

XV.

Lord Alfred his combat with Fortune began
With a few modest thalers — away they all ran —
The reserve followed fast in the rear. As his purse
Grew lighter his spirits grew sensibly worse.
One needs not a Bacon to find a cause for it:
'T is an old law in physics — *Natura abhorret*
Vacuum — and my lord, as he watched his last crown
Tumble into the bank, turned away with a frown
Which the brows of Napoleon himself might have decked
On that day of all days when an empire was wrecked
On thy plain, Waterloo, and he witnessed the last
Of his favorite Guard cut to pieces, aghast!
Just then Alfred felt, he could scarcely tell why,
Within him the sudden strange sense that some eye
Had long been intently regarding him there, —
That some gaze was upon him too searching to bear.
He rose and looked up. Was it fact? Was it fable?
Was it dream? Was it waking? Across the green table,
That face, with its features so fatally known, —
Those eyes, whose deep gaze answered strangely his own, —
What was it? Some ghost from its grave come again?
Some cheat of a feverish, fanciful brain?
Or was it herself — with those deep eyes of hers,
And that face unforgotten? — Lucile de *Nevers*!

XVI.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem,
Who appeared to herself but the dream of a dream!
'Neath those features so calm, that fair forehead so hushed,
That pale cheek forever by passion unflushed,
There yawned an insatiate void, and there heaved
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.
The brief noon of beauty was passing away,
And the chill of the twilight fell, silent and gray,
O'er that deep, self-perceived isolation of soul.
And now, as all round her the dim evening stole,
With its weird desolations, she inwardly grieved
For the want of that tender assurance received
From the warmth of a whisper, the glance of an eye,
Which should say, or should look, "Fear thou naught, — *I* am by!"
And thus, through that lonely and self-fixed existence,
Crept a vague sense of silence, and horror, and distance:
A strange sort of faint-footed fear, — like a mouse
That comes out, when 't is dark, in some old ducal house
Long deserted, where no one the creature can scare,
And the forms on the arras are all that move there.

In Rome, — in the Forum, — there opened one night
A gulf. All the augurs turned pale at the sight.
In this omen the anger of Heaven they read.
Men consulted the gods: then the oracle said: —
"Ever open this gulf shall endure, till at last
That which Rome hath most precious within it be cast."
The Romans threw in it their corn and their stuff,
But the gulf yawned as wide. Rome seemed likely enough

To be ruined ere this rent in her heart she could choke.
Then Curtius, revering the oracle, spoke :
"O Quirites ! to this Heaven's question is come :
What to Rome is most precious ? The manhood of Rome."
He plunged, and the gulf closed. The tale is not new ;
But the moral applies many ways, and is true.
How, for hearts rent in twain, shall the curse be destroyed ?
'T is a warm human life that must fill up the void.
Thorough many a heart runs the rent in the fable ;
But who to discover a Curtius is able ?

XVII.

Back she came from her long hiding-place, at the source
Of the sunrise ; where, fair in their fabulous course,
Run the rivers of Eden : an exile again,
To the cities of Europe, — the scenes, and the men,
And the life, and the ways, she had left : still oppressed
With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable breast.
The same, to the same things ! The world, she had quitted
With a sigh, with a sigh she re-entered. Soon flitted
Through the salons and clubs, to the great satisfaction
Of Paris, the news of a novel attraction.
The enchanting Lucile, the gay Countess, once more
To her old friend, the World, had re-opened her door ;
The World came, and shook hands, and was pleased and amused
With what the World then went away and abused.
From the woman's fair fame it in naught could detract :
'T was the woman's free genius it vexed and attacked
With a sneer at her freedom of action and speech.
But its light careless cavils, in truth, could not reach
The lone heart they aimed at. Her tears fell beyond
The world's limit, to feel that the world could respond
To that heart's deepest, innermost yearning, in naught.
'T was no longer this earth's idle inmates she sought :
The wit of the woman sufficed to engage
In the woman's gay court the first men of the age.
Some had genius ; and all, wealth of mind to confer
On the world : but that wealth was not lavished for her.
For the genius of man, though so human indeed,
When called out to man's help by some great human need,
The right to a man's chance acquaintance refuses
To use what it hoards for mankind's nobler uses.
Genius touches the world at but one point alone
Of that spacious circumference, never quite known
To the world : all the infinite number of lines
That radiate thither a mere point combines,
But one only, — some central affection apart
From the reach of the world, in which Genius is Heart,
And love, life's fine centre, includes heart and mind.
And therefore it was that Lucile sighed to find
Men of genius appear, one and all in her ken,
When they stooped themselves to it, as mere clever men ;
Artists, statesmen, and they in whose works are unfurled
Worlds new-fashioned for man, as mere men of the world.
And so, as alone now she stood, in the sight
Of the sunset of youth, with her face from the light,
And watched her own shadow grow long at her feet,
As though stretched out, the shade of some *other* to meet,
The woman felt homeless and childless : in scorn
She seemed mocked by the voices of children unborn ;

And when from these sombre reflections away
She turned, with a sigh, to that gay world, more gay
For her presence within it, she knew herself friendless;
That her path led from peace, and that path appeared endless!
That even her beauty had been but a snare,
And her wit sharpened only the edge of despair.

XVIII.

With a face all transfigured and flushed by surprise,
Alfred turned to Lucile. With those deep searching eyes
She looked into his own. Not a word that she said,
Not a look, not a blush, one emotion betrayed.
She seemed to smile through him, at something beyond:
When she answered his questions, she seemed to respond
To some voice in herself. With no trouble descried,
To each troubled inquiry she calmly replied.
Not so he. At the sight of that face back again
To his mind came the ghost of a long-stifled pain,
A remembered resentment, half checked by a wild
And relentful regret like a motherless child
Softly seeking admittance, with plaintive appeal,
To the heart which resisted its entrance. Lucile
And himself thus, however, with freedom allowed
To old friends, talking still side by side, left the crowd
By the crowd unobserved. Not unnoticed, however,
By the Duke and Matilda. Matilda had never
Seen her husband's new friend. She had followed by chance,
Or by instinct, the sudden half-menacing glance
Which the Duke, when he witnessed their meeting, had turned
On Lucile and Lord Alfred; and, scared, she discerned
On his features the shade of a gloom so profound
That she shuddered instinctively. Deaf to the sound
Of her voice, to some startled inquiry of hers
He replied not, but murmured, "Lucile de Nevers
Once again then? so be it!" In the mind of that man,
At that moment, there shaped itself vaguely the plan
Of a purpose malignant and dark, such alone
(To his own secret heart but imperfectly shown)
As could spring from the cloudy, fierce chaos of thought
By which all his nature to tumult was wrought.

XIX.

"So!" he thought, "they meet thus: and reweave the old charm!
And she hangs on his voice, and she leans on his arm,
And she heeds me not, seeks me not, recks not of me!
O, what if I showed her that I, too, can be
Loved by one — her own rival — more fair and more young?"
The serpent rose in him: a serpent which, stung,
Sought to sting.
Each unconscious, indeed, of the eye
Fixed upon them, Lucile and my lord sauntered by,
In converse which seemed to be earnest. A smile
Now and then seemed to show where their thoughts touched. Meanwhile
The muse of this story, convinced that they need her,
To the Duke and Matilda returns, gentle Reader.

XX.

The Duke, with that sort of aggressive false praise
Which is meant a resentful remonstrance to raise
From a listener (as sometimes a judge, just before
He pulls down the black cap, very gently goes o'er

The case for the prisoner, and deals tenderly
With the man he is minded to hang by and by),
Had referred to Lucile, and then stopped to detect
In the face of Matilda the growing effect
Of the words he had dropped. There 's no weapon that slays
Its victim so surely (if well aimed) as praise.
Thus, a pause on their converse had fallen : and now
Each was silent, preoccupied, thoughtful. You know
There are moments when silence, prolonged and unbroken,
More expressive may be than all words ever spoken.
It is when the heart has an instinct of what
In the heart of another is passing. And that
In the heart of Matilda, what was it? Whence came
To her cheek on a sudden that tremulous flame?
What weighed down her head? All your eye could discover
Was the fact that Matilda was troubled. Moreover
That trouble the Duke's presence seemed to renew.
She, however, broke silence, the first of the two.
The Duke was too prudent to shatter the spell
Of a silence which suited his purpose so well.
She was plucking the leaves from a pale blush rose blossom
Which had fallen from the nosegay she wore in her bosom.
"This poor flower," she said, "seems it not out of place
In this hot, lamplit air, with its fresh, fragile grace?"
She bent her head low as she spoke. With a smile
The Duke watched her caressing the leaves all the while,
And continued on his side the silence. He knew
This would force his companion their talk to renew
At the point that he wished ; and Matilda divined
The significant pause with new trouble of mind.
She lifted one moment her head ; but her look
Encountered the ardent regard of the Duke,
And dropped back on her floweret abashed. Then, still seeking
The assurance she fancied she showed him by speaking,
She conceived herself safe in adopting again
The theme she should most have avoided just then.

XXI.

"Duke," she said, . . . and she felt, as she spoke, her cheek burned,
"You know, then, this . . . lady?"
"Too well!" he returned.

MATILDA.

True ; you drew with emotion her portrait just now.

LUVOIS.

With emotion?

MATILDA.

Yes, yes! you described her, I know,
As possessed of a charm all unrivalled.

LUVOIS.

Alas!
You mistook me completely! You, madam, surpass
This lady as moonlight does lamplight ; as youth
Surpasses its best imitations ; as truth
The fairest of falsehoods surpasses ; as nature
Surpasses art's masterpiece ; ay, as the creature
Fresh and pure in its native adornment surpasses
All the charms got by heart at the world's looking-glasses!

"Yet you said," — she continued with some trepidation,
"That you quite comprehended" . . . a slight hesitation
Shook the sentence, . . . "a passion so strong as"

LUVOIS.

True, true!

But not in a man that had once looked at you.
Nor can I conceive, or excuse, or . . .
"Hush, hush!"
She broke in, all more fair for one innocent blush.
"Between man and woman these things differ so!
It may be that the world pardons . . . (how should I know?)
In you what it visits on us; or 't is true,
It may be, that we women are better than you."

LUVOIS.

Who denies it? Yet, madam, once more you mistake.
The world, in its judgment, some difference may make
'Twixt the man and the woman, so far as respects
Its social enactments; but not as affects
The one sentiment which, it were easy to prove,
Is the sole law we look to the moment we love.

MATILDA.

That may be. Yet I think I should be less severe.
Although so inexperienced in such things, I fear
I have learned that the heart cannot always repress
Or account for the feelings which sway it.
"Yes! yes!
That is too true, indeed!" . . . the Duke sighed.
And again
For one moment in silence continued the twain.

XXII.

At length the Duke slowly, as though he had needed
All this time to repress his emotions, proceeded:
"And yet! . . . what avails, then, to woman the gift
Of a beauty like yours, if it cannot uplift
Her heart from the reach of one doubt, one despair,
One pang of wronged love, to which women less fair
Are exposed, when they love?"
With a quick change of tone,
As though by resentment impelled, he went on:—
"The name that you bear, it is whispered, you took
From love, not convention. Well, lady, . . . that look
So excited, so keen, on the face you must know
Throughout all its expressions, — that rapturous glow —
Those eloquent features — significant eyes —
Which that pale woman sees, yet betrays no surprise,"
(He pointed his hand as he spoke to the door,
Fixing with it Lucile and Lord Alfred,)
. . . "before,
Have you ever once seen what just now you may view
In that face so familiar? . . . no, lady, 't is new.
Young, lovely, and loving, no doubt, as you are,
Are you loved?" . . .

XXIII.

He looked at her — paused — felt if thus far
The ground held yet. The ardor with which he had spoken,
This close, rapid question, thus suddenly broken,
Inspired in Matilda a vague sense of fear,
As though some indefinite danger were near.
With composure, however, at once she replied:—
"'T is three years since the day when I first was a bride,
And my husband I never had cause to suspect;
Nor ever have stooped, sir, such cause to detect.
Yet if in his looks or his acts I should see —
See, or fancy — some moment's oblivion of me,
I trust that I too should forget it, — for you
Must have seen that my heart is my husband's."
The hue
On her cheek, with the effort wherewith to the Duke
She had uttered this vague and half-frightened rebuke,

Was white as the rose in her hand. The last word
Seemed to die on her lip, and could scarcely be heard.
There was silence again.
A great step had been made
By the Duke in the words he that evening had said.
There, half drowned by the music, Matilda, that night,
Had listened, — long listened, — no doubt, in despite
Of herself, to a voice she should never have heard,
And her heart by that voice had been troubled and stirred.
And so, having suffered in silence his eye
To fathom her own, he resumed, with a sigh :

XXIV.

"Will you suffer me, lady, your thoughts to invade
By disclosing my own? The position," he said,
"In which we so strangely seem placed may excuse
The frankness and force of the words which I use.
You say that your heart is your husband's. You say
That you love him. You think so, of course, lady . . . nay,
Such a love, I admit, were a merit, no doubt.
But, trust me, no true love there can be without
Its dread penalty — jealousy.
"Well, do not start!
Until now, — either thanks to a singular art
Of supreme self-control, you have held them all down
Unrevealed in your heart, — or you never have known
Even one of those fierce irresistible pangs
Which deep passion engenders ; that anguish which hangs
On the heart like a nightmare, by jealousy bred.
But if, lady, the love you describe, in the bed
Of a blissful security thus hath reposed
Undisturbed with mild eyelids on happiness closed,
Were it not to expose to a peril unjust,
And most cruel, that happy repose you so trust
To meet, to receive, and, indeed, it may be,
For how long I know not, continue to see
A woman whose place rivals yours in the life
And the heart which not only your title of wife,
But also (forgive me!) your beauty alone,
Should have made wholly yours? — You, who gave all your own!
Reflect! — 't is the peace of existence you stake
On the turn of a die. And for whose — for his sake?
While you witness this woman, the false point of view
From which she must now be regarded by you
Will exaggerate to you, whatever they be,
The charms I admit she possesses. To me
They are trivial indeed; yet to your eyes, I fear
And foresee, they will true and intrinsic appear.
Self-unconscious, and sweetly unable to guess
How more lovely by far is the grace you possess,
You will wrong your own beauty. The graces of art,
You will take for the natural charm of the heart ;
Studied manners, the brilliant and bold repartee,
Will too soon in that fatal comparison be
To your fancy more fair than the sweet timid sense
Which, in shrinking, betrays its own best eloquence.
O then, lady, then, you will feel in your heart
The poisonous pain of a fierce jealous dart!
While you see her, yourself you no longer will see, —
You will hear her, and hear not yourself, — you will be
Unhappy ; unhappy, because you will deem
Your own power less great than her power will seem.
And I shall not be by your side, day by day,

In despite of your noble displeasure, to say
'You are fairer than she, as the star is more fair
Than the diamond, the brightest that beauty can wear!'"

XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased
The trouble Matilda felt grow in her breast.
Still she spoke with what calmness she could: —
"Sir, the while
I thank you," she said, with a faint scornful smile,
"For your fervor in painting my fancied distress: -
Allow me the right some surprise to express
At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me
The possible depth of my own misery."
"That zeal would not startle you, madam," he said,
"Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,
The peculiar interest which causes that zeal — "

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.
"Duke," she answered in accents short, cold, and severe,
As she rose from her seat, "I continue to hear;
But permit me to say, I no more understand."

"Forgive!" with a nervous appeal of the hand,
And a well-feigned confusion of voice and of look,
"Forgive, O, forgive me!" at once cried the Duke,
"I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave
I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)
For one moment to speak of myself, — for I think
That you wrong me — "
His voice as in pain seemed to sink;
And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glistened.

XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listened.

XXVII.

"Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,
Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,"
He continued, "a sorrow which draws me to side
With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not," he cried,
"At so strange an avowal.
"I seek at a ball,
For instance, — the beauty admired by all?
No! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits
Scorned of course by the beauties, and shunned by the wits.
All the world is accustomed to wound, or neglect,
Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my respect.
No Quixote, I do not affect to belong,
I admit, to those chartered redressers of wrong;
But I seek to console, where I can. 'T is a part
Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart."
These trite words, from the tone which he gave them, received
An appearance of truth, which might well be believed
By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda's. And so
He continued . . . "O lady! alas, could you know
What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen!
How many a woman, believed to have been
Without a regret, I have known turn aside
To burst into heart-broken tears undescried!
On how many a lip have I witnessed the smile
Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart the while!"
Said Matilda, "Your life, it would seem, then, must be
One long act of devotion."

"Perhaps so," said he ;
"But at least that devotion small merit can boast,
For one day may yet come, — if *one* day at the most, —
When, perceiving at last all the difference — how great ! —
'Twixt the heart that neglects and the heart that can wait,
'Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,
Some woman, that else might have passed in disdain
Or indifference by me, — in passing *that* day
Might pause with a word or a smile to repay
This devotion, — and then " . . .

XXVIII.

To Matilda's relief
At that moment her husband approached. With some grief
I must own that her welcome, perchance, was expressed
The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast
Of a conscience disturbed, and her smile not less warm,
Though she saw the Comtesse de Nevers on his arm.
The Duke turned and adjusted his collar. Thought he,
"Good ! the gods fight my battle to-night. I foresee
That the family doctor 's the part I must play.
Very well ! but the patients my visits shall pay."
Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife ;
And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife
Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmured low
Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a bow
Which betokened a distant defiance, replied
To Lucile's startled cry, as surprised she descried
Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace
Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her place
She assumed by Matilda, unconscious, perchance,
Or resolved not to notice, the half-frightened glance
That followed that movement. The Duke to his feet
Arose ; and, in silence, relinquished his seat.
One must own that the moment was awkward for all ;
But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall
Of Lucile's gracious tact was by every one felt,
And from each the reserve seemed, reluctant, to melt ;
Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four
Through the crowd sauntered, smiling.

XXIX.

Approaching the door,
Eugène de Luvois, who had fallen behind,
By Lucile, after some hesitation, was joined
With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal
Which appeared to imply, without words, "Let us feel
That the friendship between us in years that are fled,
Has survived one mad moment forgotten," she said,
"You remain, Duke, at Ems ?" He turned on her a look
Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke ;
And then, with a more than significant glance
At Matilda, maliciously answered, "Perchance
I have here an attraction. And you ?" he returned.
Lucile's eyes had followed his own, and discerned
The boast they implied. He repeated, "And you ?"
And, still watching Matilda, she answered, "I too."
And he thought, as with that word she left him, she sighed.
The next moment her place she resumed by the side
Of Matilda ; and soon they shook hands at the gate
Of the selfsame hotel.

" Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife." Page 88.

XXX.

One depressed, one elate,
The Duke and Lord Alfred again, through the glooms
Of the thick linden alley, returned to the Rooms.
His cigar each had lighted, a moment before,
At the inn, as they turned, arm-in-arm, from the door.
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's spirits, *experto*
(*Me miserum quoties!*) *crede Roberto.*
In silence, awhile, they walked onward. At last
The Duke's thoughts to language half consciously passed.

LUVOIS.

Once more! yet once more!

ALFRED.

What?

LUVOIS.

We meet her, once more,
The woman for whom we two mad men of yore
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh!) were about to destroy
Each the other!

ALFRED.

It is not with laughter that I
Raise the ghost of that once troubled time. Say! can you
Recall it with coolness and quietude now?

LUVOIS.

Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true *Parisien:*
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin, and then
The dance and the play. I am now at the play.

ALFRED.

At the play, are you now? Then perchance I now may
Presume, Duke, to ask you what, ever until
Such a moment, I waited . . .

LUVOIS.

Oh! ask what you will. *Francjeu!* on the table my cards I spread out.
Ask!

ALFRED.

Duke, you were called to a meeting (no doubt
You remember it yet) with Lucile. It was night
When you went; and before you returned it was light.
We met: you accosted me then with a brow
Bright with triumph: your words (you remember them now?)
Were "Let us be friends!"

LUVOIS.

Well?

ALFRED.

How then, after that,
Can you and she meet as acquaintances?

LUVOIS.

What!
Did she not then, herself, the Comtesse de Nevers,
Solve your riddle to-night with those soft lips of hers?

ALFRED.

In our converse to-night we avoided the past.
But the question I ask should be answered at last:
By you, if you will; if you will not, by her.

LUVOIS.

Indeed? but that question, milord, can it stir
Such an interest in you, if your passion be o'er?

ALFRED.

Yes. Esteem may remain, although love be no more.
Lucile asked me, this night, to my wife (understand
To *my wife!*) to present her. I did so. Her hand
Has clasped that of Matilda. We gentlemen owe
Respect to the name that is ours: and, if so,

To the woman that bears it a twofold respect.
Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile then reject
The proffer you made of your hand and your name?
Or did you on her love then relinquish a claim
Urged before? I ask bluntly this question, because
My title to do so is clear by the laws
That all gentlemen honor. Make only one sign
That you know of Lucile de Nevers aught, in fine,
For which, if your own virgin sister were by,
From Lucile you would shield her acquaintance, and I
And Matilda leave Ems on the morrow.

XXXI.

The Duke
Hesitated and paused. He could tell, by the look
Of the man at his side, that he meant what he said,
And there flashed in a moment these thoughts through his head:
"Leave Ems! would that suit me? no! that were again
To mar all. And besides, if I do not explain,
She herself will . . . *et puis, il a raison; on est*
Gentilhomme avant tout!" He replied therefore,
"Nay!
Madame de Nevers had rejected me. I,
In those days, I was mad; and in some mad reply
I threatened the life of the rival to whom
That rejection was due, I was led to presume.
She feared for his life; and the letter which then
She wrote me, I showed you; we met: and again
My hand was refused, and my love was denied,
And the glance you mistook was the vizard which Pride
Lends to Humiliation.
"And so," half in jest,
He went on, "in this best world, 't is all for the best;
You are wedded, (blessed Englishman!) wedded to one
Whose past can be called into question by none:
And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still laugh to feel
I am lord of myself, and the Mode: and Lucile
Still shines from her pedestal, frigid and fair
As yon German moon o'er the linden-tops there!
A Dian in marble that scorns any troth
With the little love-gods, whom I thank for us both,
While she smiles from her lonely Olympus apart,
That her arrows are marble as well as her heart.
Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!"

XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,
Turned and entered the Rooms which, thus talking, meanwhile,
They had reached.

XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (overthrown
Heart and mind!) in the darkness bewildered, alone:
"And so," to himself did he mutter,
"and so
'T was to rescue my life, gentle spirit! and, oh,
For this did I doubt her? . . . a light word — a look —
The mistake of a moment! . . . for this I forsook —
For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile! O Lucile!"
Thought and memory rang, like a funeral peal,
Weary changes on one dirge-like note through his brain,
As he strayed down the darkness.

XXXIV.

Re-entering again
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He turned to roulette,
And sat down, and played fast, and lost largely, and yet
He still smiled: night deepened: he played his last number:
Went home: and soon slept: and still smiled in his slumber.

XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Rochefoucauld wrote,
"In the grief or mischance of a friend you may note,
There is something which always gives pleasure."
Alas!
That reflection fell short of the truth as it was.
La Rochefoucauld might have as truly set down, —
"No misfortune, but what some one turns to his own
Advantage its mischief: no sorrow, but of it
There ever is somebody ready to profit:
No affliction without its stock-jobbers, who all
Gamble, speculate, play on the rise and the fall
Of another man's heart, and make traffic in it."
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!
Fool! one man's wit
All men's selfishness how should it fathom?
O sage,
Dost thou satirize Nature?
She laughs at thy page.

CANTO II.

I.

COUSIN JOHN *to* COUSIN ALFRED.

"LONDON, 18—.

"MY DEAR ALFRED:
Your last letters put me in pain.
This contempt of existence, this listless disdain
Of your own life, — its joys and its duties, — the deuce
Take my wits if they find for it half an excuse!
I wish that some Frenchman would shoot off your leg,
And compel you to stump through the world on a peg.
I wish that you had, like myself, (more's the pity!)
To sit seven hours on this cursed committee.
I wish that you knew, sir, how salt is the bread
Of another — (what is it that Dante has said?)
And the trouble of other men's stairs. In a word,
I wish fate had some real affliction conferred
On your whimsical self, that, at least, you had cause
For neglecting life's duties, and damning its laws!
This pressure against all the purpose of life,
This self-ebullition, and ferment, and strife,
Betokened, I grant that it may be in truth,
The richness and strength of the new wine of youth.
But if, when the wine should have mellowed with time,
Being bottled and binned, to a flavor sublime
It retains the same acrid, incongruous taste,
Why, the sooner to throw it away that we haste
The better, I take it. And this vice of snarling,
Self-love's little lapdog, the overfed darling
Of a hypochondriacal fancy appears,
To my thinking, at least, in a man of your years,
At the midnoon of manhood with plenty to do,
And every incentive for doing it too, —
With the duties of life just sufficiently pressing
For prayer, and of joys more than most men for blessing;
With a pretty young wife, and a pretty full purse, —
Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or worse!
I wish I could get you at least to agree
To take life as it is, and consider with me,
If it be not all smiles, that it is not all sneers;
It admits honest laughter, and needs honest tears.
Do you think none have known but yourself all the pain
Of hopes that retreat, and regrets that remain?
And all the wide distance fate fixes, no doubt,
'Twixt the life that's within, and the life that's without?

What one of us finds the world just as he likes?
Or gets what he wants when he wants it? Or strikes
Without missing the thing that he strikes at the first?
Or walks without stumbling? Or quenches his thirst
At one draught? Bah! I tell you! I, bachelor John,
Have had griefs of my own. But what then? I push on
All the faster perchance that I yet feel the pain
Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble again.
God means every man to be happy, be sure.
He sends us no sorrows that have not some cure.
Our duty down here is to do, not to know.
Live as though life were earnest, and life will be so.
Let each moment, like Time's last ambassador, come:
It will wait to deliver its message; and some
Sort of answer it merits. It is not the deed
A man does, but the way that he does it, should plead
For the man's compensation in doing it. "Here,
My next neighbor 's a man with twelve thousand a year,
Who deems that life has not a pastime more pleasant
Than to follow a fox or to slaughter a pheasant.
Yet this fellow goes through a contested election,
Lives in London, and sits, like the soul of dejection,
All the day through upon a committee, and late
To the last, every night, through the dreary debate,
As though he were getting each speaker by heart,
Though amongst them he never presumes to take part.
One asks himself why, without murmur or question,
He foregoes all his tastes, and destroys his digestion,
For a labor of which the result seems so small.

'The man is ambitious,' you say. Not at all.
He has just sense enough to be fully aware
That he never can hope to be Premier, or share
The renown of a Tully; — or even to hold
A subordinate office. He is not so bold
As to fancy the House for ten minutes would bear
With patience his modest opinions to hear.
'But he wants something!'
"What! with twelve thousand a year?
What could Government give him would be half so dear
To his heart as a walk with a dog and a gun
Through his own pheasant woods, or a capital run?
'No; but vanity fills out the emptiest brain;
The man would be more than his neighbors, 't is plain;
And the drudgery drearily gone through in town
Is more than repaid by provincial renown.
Enough if some Marchioness, lively and loose,
Shall have eyed him with passing complaisance; the goose,
If the Fashion to him open one of its doors,
As proud as a sultan, returns to his boors.'
Wrong again! if you think so.
"For, *primo;* my friend
Is the head of a family known from one end
Of his shire to the other, as the oldest; and therefore
He despises fine lords and fine ladies. *He* care for
A peerage? no, truly! *Secondo;* he rarely
Or never goes out: dines at Bellamy's sparely,
And abhors what you call the gay world. "Then, I ask,
What inspires, and consoles, such a self-imposed task
As the life of this man, — but the sense of its duty?
And I swear that the eyes of the haughtiest beauty

Have never inspired in my soul that intense,
Reverential, and loving, and absolute sense
Of heartfelt admiration I feel for this man,
As I see him beside me ; — there, wearing the wan
London daylight away, on his humdrum committee ;
So unconscious of all that awakens my pity,
And wonder — and worship, I might say.
"To me
There seems something nobler than genius to be
In that dull patient labor no genius relieves,
That absence of all joy which yet never grieves ;
The humility of it ! the grandeur withal !
The sublimity of it ! And yet, should you call
The man's own very slow apprehension to this,
He would ask, with a stare, what sublimity is !
His work is the duty to which he was born ;
He accepts it, without ostentation or scorn :
And this man is no uncommon type (I thank Heaven !)
Of this land's common men. In all other lands, even
The type's self is wanting. Perchance, 't is the reason
That Government oscillates ever 'twixt treason
And tyranny elsewhere.
"I wander away
Too far, though, from what I was wishing to say.
You, for instance, read Plato. You know that the soul
Is immortal ; and put this in rhyme, on the whole,
Very well, with sublime illustration. Man's heart
Is a mystery, doubtless. You trace it in art : —
The Greek Psyche, — that 's beauty, — the perfect ideal.
But then comes the imperfect, perfectible real,
With its pained aspiration and strife. In those pale
Ill-drawn virgins of Giotto you see it prevail.
You have studied all this. Then, the universe, too,
Is not a mere house to be lived in, for you.
Geology opens the mind. So you know
Something also of strata and fossils · these show
The bases of cosmical structure : some mention
Of the nebulous theory demands your attention ;
And so on.
"In short, it is clear the interior
Of your brain, my dear Alfred, is vastly superior
In fibre, and fulness, and function, and fire,
To that of my poor parliamentary squire ;
But your life leaves upon me (forgive me this heat
Due to friendship) the sense of a thing incomplete.
You fly high. But what is it, in truth, you fly at ?
My mind is not satisfied quite as to that.
An old illustration 's as good as a new,
Provided the old illustration be true.
We are children. Mere kites are the fancies we fly,
Though we marvel to see them ascending so high ;
Things slight in themselves, — long-tailed toys, and no more.
What is it that makes the kite steadily soar
Through the realms where the cloud and the whirlwind have birth
But the tie that attaches the kite to the earth ?
I remember the lessons of childhood, you see,
And the hornbook I learned on my poor mother's knee.
In truth, I suspect little else do we learn
From this great book of life, which so shrewdly we turn,
Saving how to apply, with a good or bad grace,
What we learned in the hornbook of childhood.
"Your case
Is exactly in point.
"Fly your kite, if you please,
Out of sight : let it go where it will, on the breeze ;

But cut not the one thread by which it is bound,
Be it never so high, to this poor human ground.
No man is the absolute lord of his life.
You, my friend, have a home, and a sweet and dear wife.
If I often have sighed by my own silent fire,
With the sense of a sometimes recurring desire
For a voice sweet and low, or a face fond and fair,
Some dull winter evening to solace and share
With the love which the world its good children allows
To shake hands with, — in short, a legitimate spouse,
This thought has consoled me: "At least I have given
For my own good behavior no hostage to heaven."
You have, though. Forget it not! faith, if you do,
I would rather break stones on a road than be you.
If any man wilfully injured, or led
That little girl wrong, I would sit on his head,
Even though you yourself were the sinner!
"And this
Leads me back (do not take it, dear cousin, amiss!)
To the matter I meant to have mentioned at once,
But these thoughts put it out of my head for the nonce.
Of all the preposterous humbugs and shams,
Of all the old wolves ever taken for lambs,
The wolf best received by the flock he devours
Is that uncle-in-law, my dear Alfred, of yours.
At least, this has long been my settled conviction,
And I almost would venture at once the prediction
That before very long — but no matter! I trust
For his sake and our own, that I may be unjust.
But Heaven forgive me, if cautious I am on
The score of such men as, with both God and Mammon,
Seem so shrewdly familiar.
"Neglect not this warning.
There were rumors afloat in the City this morning
Which I scarce like the sound of. Who knows? would he fleece
At a pinch, the old hypocrite, even his own niece?
For the sake of Matilda I cannot importune
Your attention too early. If all your wife's fortune
Is yet in the hands of that specious old sinner,
Who would dice with the devil, and yet rise up winner,
I say, lose no time! get it out of the grab
Of her trustee and uncle, Sir Ridley MacNab.
I trust those deposits, at least, are drawn out,
And safe at this moment from danger or doubt.
A wink is as good as a nod to the wise.
Verbum sap. I admit nothing yet justifies
My mistrust; but I have in my own mind a notion
That old Ridley's white waistcoat, and airs of devotion,
Have long been the only ostensible capital
On which he does business. If so, time must sap it all,
Sooner or later. Look sharp. Do not wait,
Draw at once. In a fortnight it may be too late.
I admit I know nothing. I can but suspect;
I give you my notions. Form yours and reflect.
My love to Matilda. Her mother looks well.
I saw her last week. I have nothing to tell
Worth your hearing. We think that the Government here
Will not last our next session. Fitz Funk is a peer,
You will see by the Times. There are symptoms which show
That the ministers now are preparing to go,

And finish their feast of the loaves and the fishes.
It is evident that they are clearing the dishes,
And cramming their pockets with bonbons. Your news
Will be always acceptable. Vere, of the Blues,
Has bolted with Lady Selina. And so,
You have met with that hot-headed Frenchman? I know
That the man is a sad *mauvais sujet.* Take care
Of Matilda. I wish I could join you both there;
But, before I am free, you are sure to be gone.
Good by, my dear fellow. Yours, anxiously,

"JOHN."

II.

This is just the advice I myself would have given
To Lord Alfred, had I been his cousin, which, Heaven
Be praised, I am not. But it reached him indeed
In an unlucky hour, and received little heed.
A half-languid glance was the most that he lent at
That time to these homilies. *Primum dementat*
Quem Deus vult perdere. Alfred in fact
Was behaving just then in a way to distract
Job's self had Job known him. The more you'd have thought
The Duke's court to Matilda his eye would have caught,
The more did his aspect grow listless to hers,
And the more did it beam to Lucile de Nevers.
And Matilda, the less she found love in the look
Of her husband, the less did she shrink from the Duke.
With each day that passed o'er them, they each, heart from heart,
Woke to feel themselves further and further apart.
More and more of his time Alfred passed at the table;
Played high, and lost more than to lose he was able.
He grew feverish, querulous, absent, perverse, —
And here I must mention, what made matters worse,
That Lucile and the Duke at the self-same hotel
With the Vargraves resided. It needs not to tell
That they all saw too much of each other. The weather
Was so fine that it brought them each day all together
In the garden, to listen, of course, to the band.
The house was a sort of phalanstery; and
Lucile and Matilda were pleased to discover
A mutual passion for music. Moreover,
The Duke was an excellent tenor: could sing
"*Ange si pure*" in a way to bring down on the wing
All the angels St. Cicely played to. My lord
Would also at times, when he was not too bored,
Play Beethoven, and Wagner's new music, not ill;
With some little things of his own, showing skill.
For which reason, as well as for some others too,
Their rooms were a pleasant enough rendezvous.
Did Lucile, then, encourage (the heartless coquette!)
All the mischief she could not but mark? Patience yet!

III.

In that garden, an arbor, withdrawn from the sun,
By laburnum and lilac with blooms overrun,
Formed a vault of cool verdure, which made, when the heat
Of the noontide hung heavy, a gracious retreat.
And here, with some friends of their own little world,
In the warm afternoons, till the shadows uncurled
From the feet of the lindens, and crept through the grass,
Their blue hours would this gay little colony pass.

The men loved to smoke, and the women to bring,
Undeterred by tobacco, their work there, and sing
Or converse, till the dew fell, and homeward the bee
Floated, heavy with honey. Towards eve there was tea
(A luxury due to Matilda), and ice,
Fruit, and coffee. Ὦ Ἔσπερε, πάντα φέρεις!
Such an evening it was, while Matilda presided
O'er the rustic arrangements thus daily provided,
With the Duke, and a small German Prince with a thick head,
And an old Russian Countess both witty and wicked,
And two Austrian Colonels, — that Alfred, who yet
Was lounging alone with his last cigarette,
Saw Lucile de Nevers by herself pacing slow
'Neath the shade of the cool linden-trees to and fro,
And joining her, cried, "Thank the good stars, we meet!
I have so much to say to you!"
"Yes? . . ." with her sweet
Serene voice, she replied to him . . .
"Yes? and I too
Was wishing, indeed, to say somewhat to you."
She was paler just then than her wont was. The sound
Of her voice had within it a sadness profound.
"You are ill?" he exclaimed.
"No!" she hurriedly said,
"No, no!"
"You alarm me!"
She drooped down her head.
"If your thoughts have of late sought, or cared, to divine
The purpose of what has been passing in mine,
My farewell can scarcely alarm you."

ALFRED.

Lucile!
Your farewell! you go!

LUCILE.

Yes, Lord Alfred.

ALFRED.

Reveal
The cause of this sudden unkindness.

LUCILE.

Unkind?

ALFRED.

Yes! what else is this parting?

LUCILE.

No, no! are you blind?
Look into your own heart and home. Can you see
No reason for this, save unkindness in me?
Look into the eyes of your wife, — those true eyes
Too pure and too honest in aught to disguise
The sweet soul shining through them.

ALFRED.

Lucile! (first and last
Be the word, if you will!) let me speak of the past.
I know now, alas! though I know it too late,
What passed at that meeting which settled my fate.
Nay, nay, interrupt me not yet! let it be!
I but say what is due to yourself, — due to me,
And must say it.
He rushed incoherently on,
Describing how, lately, the truth he had known,
To explain how, and whence, he had wronged her before,
All the complicate coil wound about him of yore.
All the hopes that had flown with the faith that was fled,
"And then, O Lucile, what was left me," he said,
"When my life was defrauded of you, but to take
That life, as 't was left, and endeavor to make
Unobserved by another, the void which remained
Unconcealed to myself? If I have not attained,
I have striven. One word of unkindness has never

Passed my lips to Matilda. Her least wish has ever
Received my submission. And if, of a truth,
I have failed to renew what I felt in my youth,
I at least have been loyal to what I *do* feel,
Respect, duty, honor, affection. Lucile,
I speak not of love now, nor love's long regret:
I would not offend you, nor dare I forget
The ties that are round me. But may there not be
A friendship yet hallowed between you and me?
May we not be yet friends, — friends the dearest?"

"Alas!"
She replied, "for one moment, perchance, did it pass
Through my own heart, that dream which forever hath brought
To those who indulge it in innocent thought
So fatal and evil a waking! But no.
For in lives such as ours are, the Dream-tree would grow
On the borders of Hades: beyond it, what lies?
The wheel of Ixion, alas! and the cries
Of the lost and tormented. Departed, for us,
Are the days when with innocence we could discuss
Dreams like these. Fled, indeed, are the dreams of *my* life!
O trust me, the best friend you have is your wife.
And I, — in that pure child's pure virtue, I bow
To the beauty of virtue. I felt on my brow
Not one blush when I first took her hand. With no blush
Shall I clasp it to-night, when I leave you.
"Hush! hush!
I would say what I wished to have said when you came.
Do not think that years leave us and find us the same!
The woman you knew long ago, long ago,
Is no more. You yourself have within you, I know,
The germ of a joy in the years yet to be,
Whereby the past years will bear fruit.
As for me,
I go my own way, — onward, upward!
"O yet,
Let me thank you for that which ennobled regret,
When it came, as it beautified hope ere it fled, —
The love I once felt for you. True, it is dead,
But it is not corrupted. I too have at last
Lived to learn that love is not — (such love as is past,
Such love as youth dreams of at least) — the sole part
Of life, which is able to fill up the heart;
Even that of a woman.
"Between you and me
Heaven fixes a gulf, over which you must see
That our guardian angels can bear us no more.
We each of us stand on an opposite shore.
Trust a woman's opinion for once. Women learn,
By an instinct men never attain, to discern
Each other's true natures. Matilda is fair,
Matilda is young — see her now, sitting there! —
How tenderly fashioned — (O, is she not? say,)
To love and be loved!"

IV.

He turned sharply away, —
"Matilda is young, and Matilda is fair;
Of all that you tell me pray deem me aware;
But Matilda's a statue, Matilda's a child;
Matilda loves not — "
Lucile quietly smiled
As she answered him: — "Yesterday, all that you say
Might be true; it is false, wholly false, though, to-day."
"How? — what mean you?"
"I mean that to-day," she replied,
"The statue with life has become vivified:
I mean that the child to a woman has grown:
And that woman is jealous."
"What! she?" with a tone

Of ironical wonder, he answered — "what, she!
She jealous! — Matilda! — of whom, pray? — not me!"

"My lord, you deceive yourself; no one but you
Is she jealous of. Trust me. And thank Heaven, too,
That so lately this passion within her hath grown.
For who shall declare, if for months she had known
What for days she has known all too keenly, I fear,
That knowledge perchance might have cost you more dear?"
"Explain! explain, madam!" he cried in surprise;
And terror and anger enkindled his eyes.

"How blind are you men!" she replied. "Can you doubt
That a woman, young, fair, and neglected —"
"Speak out!"
He gasped with emotion. "Lucile! you mean — what?
Do you doubt her fidelity?"
"Certainly not.
Listen to me, my friend. What I wish to explain
Is so hard to shape forth. I could almost refrain
From touching a subject so fragile. However,
Bear with me awhile, if I frankly endeavor
To invade for one moment your innermost life.
Your honor, Lord Alfred, and that of your wife,
Are dear to me, — most dear! And I am convinced
That you rashly are risking that honor."
He winced,
And turned pale, as she spoke.
She had aimed at his heart,
And she saw, by his sudden and terrified start,
That her aim had not missed.
"Stay, Lucile!" he exclaimed,
"What in truth do you mean by these words, vaguely framed
To alarm me? Matilda? — My wife? — do you know?" —

"I know that your wife is as spotless as snow.
But I know not how far your continued neglect
Her nature, as well as her heart, might affect.
Till at last, by degrees, that serene atmosphere
Of her unconscious purity, faint and yet clear,
Like the indistinct golden and vaporous fleece
Which surrounded and hid the celestials in Greece
From the glances of men, would disperse and depart
At the sighs of a sick and delirious heart, —
For jealousy is to a woman, be sure,
A disease healed too oft by a criminal cure;
And the heart left too long to its ravage, in time
May find weakness in virtue, reprisal in crime."

V.

"Such thoughts could have never," he faltered, "I know,
Reached the heart of Matilda."
"Matilda? O no!
But reflect! when such thoughts do not come of themselves
To the heart of a woman neglected, like elves
That seek lonely places, — there rarely is wanting
Some voice at her side, with an evil enchanting
To conjure them to her."
"O lady, beware!
At this moment, around me I search everywhere
For a clew to your words" —
"You mistake them," she said,
Half fearing, indeed, the effect they had made.
"I was putting a mere hypothetical case."

With a long look of trouble he gazed in her face.
"Woe to him, . . ." he exclaimed . . .
"woe to him that shall feel
Such a hope! for I swear, if he did but reveal
One glimpse, — it should be the last hope of his life!"

The clenched hand and bent eyebrow betokened the strife
She had roused in his heart.
"You forget," she began,
"That you menace yourself. You yourself are the man
That is guilty. Alas! must it ever be so?
Do we stand in our own light, wherever we go,
And fight our own shadows forever? O think!
The trial from which you, the stronger ones, shrink,
You ask woman, the weaker one, still to endure;
You bid her be true to the laws you abjure;
To abide by the ties you yourselves rend asunder,
With the force that has failed you; and that too, when under
The assumption of rights which to her you refuse,
The immunity claimed for yourselves you abuse!
Where the contract exists, it involves obligation
To both husband and wife, in an equal relation.
You unloose, in asserting your own liberty,
A knot, which, unloosed, leaves another as free.
Then, O Alfred! be juster at heart: and thank Heaven
That Heaven to your wife such a nature has given
That you have not wherewith to reproach her, albeit
You have cause to reproach your own self, could you see it!"

VI.

In the silence that followed the last word she said,
In the heave of his chest, and the droop of his head,
Poor Lucile marked her words had sufficed to impart
A new germ of motion and life to that heart
Of which he himself had so recently spoken
As dead to emotion, — exhausted, or broken!
New fears would awaken new hopes in his life.
In the husband indifferent no more to the wife
She already, as she had foreseen, could discover
That Matilda had gained, at her hands, a new lover.
So after some moments of silence, whose spell
They both felt, she extended her hand to him. . . .

VII.

"Well?"

VIII.

"Lucile," he replied, as that soft quiet hand
In his own he clasped warmly, "I both understand
And obey you."
"Thank Heaven!" she murmured.
"O yet,
One word, I beseech you! I cannot forget,"
He exclaimed, "we are parting for life. You have shown
My pathway to me: but say, what is your own?"
The calmness with which until then she had spoken
In a moment seemed strangely and suddenly broken.
She turned from him nervously, hurriedly.
"Nay,
I know not," she murmured, "I follow the way
Heaven leads me; I cannot foresee to what end.
I know only that far, far away it must tend
From all places in which we have met, or might meet.
Far away! — onward — upward!"
A smile strange and sweet
As the incense that rises from some sacred cup
And mixes with music, stole forth, and breathed up
Her whole face, with those words.
"Wheresoever it be,
May all gentlest angels attend you!" sighed he,
"And bear my heart's blessing wherever you are!"
And her hand, with emotion, he kissed.

IX.

From afar
That kiss was, alas ! by Matilda beheld
With far other emotions : her young bosom swelled,
And her young cheek with anger was crimsoned.
The Duke
Adroitly attracted towards it her look
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-construed,
Renowned Bishop Berkeley has fully, for one, strewed
With arguments page upon page to teach folks
That the world they inhabit is only a hoax.
But it surely is hard, since we can't do without them,
That our senses should make us so oft wish to doubt them !

CANTO III.

I.

When first the red savage called Man strode, a king,
Through the wilds of creation, — the very first thing
That his naked intelligence taught him to feel
Was the shame of himself ; and the wish to conceal
Was the first step in art. From the apron which Eve
In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to weave,
To the furbelowed flounce and the broad crinoline
Of my lady . . . you all know of course whom I mean . . .
This art of concealment has greatly increased.
A whole world lies cryptic in each human breast ;
And that drama of passions as old as the hills,
Which the moral of all men in each man fulfils,
Is only revealed now and then to our eyes
In the newspaper-files and the courts of assize.

II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight assembled,
'Mid those walks over which the laburnum-bough trembled,
And the deep-bosomed lilac, emparadising
The haunts where the blackbird and thrush flit and sing,
The keenest eye could but have seen, and seen only,
A circle of friends, minded not to leave lonely
The bird on the bough, or the bee on the blossom ;
Conversing at ease in the garden's green bosom,
Like those who, when Florence was yet in her glories,
Cheated death and killed time with Boccaccian stories.
But at length the long twilight more deeply grew shaded,
And the fair night the rosy horizon invaded.
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on the bough,
Through the shadowy garden were slumbering now.
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.
And, as each little sprightly and garrulous leaf
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,
They all seemed to be saying . . . "Once more we 're alone,
And, thank Heaven, those tiresome people are gone !"

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the luminous air,
Large, loving, and languid, the stars here and there,
Like the eyes of shy passionate women, looked down
O'er the dim world whose sole tender light was their own,
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber descended,
And entered the garden, unseen, unattended.
Her forehead was aching and parched, and her breast
By a vague inexpressible sadness oppressed ;

A sadness which led her, she scarcely knew how,
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save, indeed, that just now
The house, out of which with a gasp she had fled
Half-stifled, seemed ready to sink on her head) . . .
Out into the night air, the silence, the bright
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation of night!
Her husband that day had looked once in her face,
And pressed both her hands in a silent embrace,
And reproachfully noticed her recent dejection
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit affection.
He, of late so indifferent and listless! . . . at last
Was he startled and awed by the change which had passed
O'er the once radiant face of his young wife? Whence came
That long look of solicitous fondness? . . . the same
Look and language of quiet affection, — the look
And the language, alas! which so often she took
For pure love in the simple repose of its purity, —
Her own heart thus lulled to a fatal security!
Ha! would he deceive her again by this kindness?
Had she been, then, O fool! in her innocent blindness
The sport of transparent illusion? ah, folly!
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy, so holy,
She had taken, till then, in the heart, not alone
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in her own,
For true love, nothing else, after all, did it prove
But a friendship profanely familiar?
"And love? . . .
What was love, then? . . . not calm, not secure, — scarcely kind!
But in one, all intensest emotions combined:
Life and death: pain and rapture."

Thus wandering astray,
Led by doubt, through the darkness she wandered away.
All silently crossing, recrossing the night,
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,
The swift-shooting stars through the infinite burned,
And into the infinite ever returned.
And silently o'er the obscure and unknown
In the heart of Matilda there darted and shone
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the deeps, to expire,
Leaving traces behind them of tremulous fire.

IV.

She entered that arbor of lilacs, in which
The dark air with odors hung heavy and rich,
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.
'T was the place
In which she so lately had sat, face to face
With her husband, — and her, the pale stranger detested,
Whose presence her heart like a plague had infested.
The whole spot with evil remembrance was haunted.
Through the darkness there rose on the heart which it daunted
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far away
The acacias were muttering, like mischievous elves,
The whole story over again to themselves,
Each word, — and each word was a wound! By degrees
Her memory mingled its voice with the trees.

V.

Like the whisper Eve heard, when she paused by the root
Of the sad tree of knowledge, and gazed on its fruit,
To the heart of Matilda the trees seemed to hiss
Wild instructions, revealing man's last right, which is
The right of reprisals.
An image uncertain,

And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went;
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent:
It passed and repassed her; it went and it came
Forever returning; forever the same;
And forever more clearly defined; till her eyes
In that outline obscure could at last recognize
The man to whose image, the more and the more
That her heart, now aroused from its calm sleep of yore,
From her husband detached itself slowly, with pain,
Her thoughts had returned, and returned to, again,
As though by some secret indefinite law, —
The vigilant Frenchman, — Eugène de Luvois!

VI.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some
Night-witchcraft her vision a fact had become.
On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,
That a man was approaching behind her. She knew
By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,
And the quick-beating heart, that this man was Eugène.
Her first instinct was flight; but she felt her slight foot
As heavy as though to the soil it had root.
And the Duke's voice retained her, like fear in a dream.

VII.

"Ah, lady! in life there are meetings which seem
Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too?
Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you?
Alone with my thoughts, on this starlighted lawn,
By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn
To revisit the memories left in the place
Where so lately this evening I looked in your face.
And I find, — you, yourself, — my own dream!
"Can there be
In this world one thought common to you and to me?
If so, . . . I, who deemed but a moment ago
My heart uncompanioned, save only by woe,
Should indeed be more blessed than I dare to believe —
Ah, but *one* word, but one from your lips to receive" . . .

Interrupting him quickly, she murmured,
"I sought,
Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,
Which I needed." . . .
"Lives solitude only for one?
Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?
Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for this? —
The same thought in both hearts, — be it sorrow or bliss;
If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady, — you,
Are you not yet alone, — even though we be two?"

"For that," . . . said Matilda, . . .
"needs were, you should read
What I have in my heart." . . .
"Think you, lady, indeed,
You are yet of that age when a woman conceals
In her heart so completely whatever she feels
From the heart of the man whom it interests to know
And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not so,
Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,
But I read in your heart as I read in a book."

"Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless
It be, of a truth, a profound weariness,
And some sadness?"
"No doubt. To all facts there are laws.

The effect has its cause, and I mount to
the cause."

VIII.

Matilda shrank back ; for she suddenly
found
That a finger was pressed on the yet
bleeding wound
She herself had but that day perceived
in her breast.

"You are sad," . . . said the Duke (and
that finger yet pressed
With a cruel persistence the wound it
made bleed) —
"You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the
first need
Of a young and a beautiful woman is
to be
Beloved, and to love. You are sad : for
you see
That you are not beloved, as you deemed
that you were :
You are sad : for that knowledge hath
left you aware
That you have not yet loved, though you
thought that you had.
Yes, yes ! . . . you are sad — because
knowledge is sad ! "
He could not have read more profoundly
her heart.
"What gave you," she cried, with a
terrified start,
"Such strange power ? " . . .
"To read in your thoughts ? " he
exclaimed,
"O lady, — a love, deep, profound, —
be it blamed
Or rejected, — a love, true, intense, —
such, at least,
As you, and you only, could wake in my
breast ! "

"Hush, hush ! . . . I beseech you . . .
for pity ! " she gasped,
Snatching hurriedly from him the hand
he had clasped
In her effort instinctive to fly from the
spot.

"For pity ? " . . . he echoed, "for pity !
and what
Is the pity you owe him ? his pity for
you !
He, the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen
dew !
The guardian and guide of a woman,
young, fair,
And matchless ! (whose happiness did
he not swear
To cherish through life ?) he neglects her
— for whom ?
For a fairer than she ? No ! the rose in
the bloom
Of that beauty which, even when hidden,
can prevail
To keep sleepless with song the aroused
nightingale,
Is not fairer ; for even in the pure world
of flowers
Her symbol is not, and this poor world
of ours
Has no second Matilda ! For whom ?
Let that pass !
'T is not I, 't is not you, that can name
her, alas !
And *I* dare not question or judge her.
But why,
Why cherish the cause of your own
misery ?
Why think of one, lady, who thinks not
of you ?
Why be bound by a chain which himself
he breaks through ?
And why, since you have but to stretch
forth your hand,
The love which you need and deserve to
command,
Why shrink ? Why repel it ? "
"O hush, sir ! O hush ! "
Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart
were one blush.
"Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble
my life !
Is not Alfred your friend ? and am I not
his wife ? "

IX.

"And have I not, lady," he answered,
. . . "respected
His rights as a friend, till himself he
neglected
Your rights as a wife ? Do you think
't is alone
For three days I have loved you ? My
love may have grown
I admit, day by day, since I first felt
your eyes,
In watching their tears, and in sounding
your sighs.
But, O lady ! I loved you before I be-
lieved
That your eyes ever wept, or your heart
ever grieved.

Then I deemed you were happy — I deemed you possessed
All the love you deserved, — and I hid in my breast
My own love, till this hour — when I could not but feel
Your grief gave me the right my own grief to reveal!
I knew, years ago, of the singular power
Which Lucile o'er your husband possessed. Till the hour
In which he revealed it himself, did I, — say! —
By a word, or a look, such a secret betray?
No! no! do me justice. I never have spoken
Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties he had broken
Which bound *your* heart to him. And now — now, that his love
For another hath left your own heart free to rove,
What is it, — even now, — that I kneel to implore you?
Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me adore you
Unblamed: to have confidence in me: to spend
On me not one thought, save to think me your friend.
Let me speak to you, — ah, let me speak to you still!
Hush to silence my words in your heart, if you will.
I ask no response: I ask only your leave
To live yet in your life, and to grieve when you grieve!"

X.

"Leave me, leave me!" . . . she gasped, with a voice thick and low
From emotion. "For pity's sake, Duke, let me go!
I feel that to blame we should both of us be,
Did I linger."
"To blame? yes, no doubt!" . . . answered he,
"If the love of your husband, in bringing you peace,
Had forbidden you hope. But he signs your release
By the hand of another. One moment! but one!
Who knows when, alas! I may see you alone
As to-night I have seen you? or when we may meet
As to-night we have met? when, entranced at your feet,
As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow
The thoughts which are pining for utterance now?"
"Duke! Duke!" . . . she exclaimed . . .
"for heaven's sake let me go!
It is late. In the house they will miss me, I know.
We must not be seen here together. The night
Is advancing. I feel overwhelmed with affright!
It is time to return to my lord."
"To your lord?"
He repeated, with lingering reproach on the word,
"To your lord? do you think he awaits you, in truth?
Is he anxiously missing your presence, forsooth?
Return to your lord! . . . his restraint to renew?
And hinder the glances which are not for you?
No, no! . . . at this moment his looks seek the face
Of another! another is there in your place!
Another consoles him! another receives
The soft speech which from silence your absence relieves!"

XI.

"You mistake, sir!" . . . responded a voice, calm, severe,
And sad, . . . "You mistake, sir! that other is here."

Eugène and Matilda both started.
"Lucile!"
With a half-stifled scream, as she felt herself reel
From the place where she stood, cried Matilda.
"Ho, oh!
What! eaves-dropping, madam?" . . . the Duke cried . . . "And so
You were listening?"
"Say, rather," she said, "that I heard,
Without wishing to hear it, that infamous word, —
Heard — and therefore reply."
"Belle Comtesse," said the Duke,

With concentrated wrath in the savage rebuke,
Which betrayed that he felt himself baffled . . . "you know
That your place is not *here*."
"Duke," she answered him slow,
"My place is wherever my duty is clear;
And therefore my place, at this moment, is here.
O lady, this morning my place was beside
Your husband, because (as she said this she sighed)
I felt that from folly fast growing to crime —
The crime of self-blindness — Heaven yet spared me time
To save for the love of an innocent wife
All that such love deserved in the heart and the life
Of the man to whose heart and whose life you alone
Can with safety confide the pure trust of your own."

She turned to Matilda, and lightly laid on her
Her soft, quiet hand . . .
"'T is, O lady, the honor
Which that man has confided to you, that, in spite
Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save to-night —
Save for both of you, lady! for yours I revere;
Duc de Luvois, what say you? — my place is not here?"

XII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she caught,
Wound one arm round her waist unresisted, and sought
Gently, softly, to draw her away from the spot.
The Duke stood confounded, and followed them not.
But not yet the house had they reached when Lucile
Her tender and delicate burden could feel
Sink and falter beside her. O, then she knelt down,
Flung her arms round Matilda, and pressed to her own
The poor bosom beating against her.
The moon,
Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and brimful of June,
Floated up from the hillside, sloped over the vale,
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven, with one pale,
Minute, scintillescent, and tremulous star
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-lit car,
Thus to each of those women revealing the face
Of the other. Each bore on her features the trace
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward shame
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with flame.
With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not but feel
That a heavenly hand was upon her that night,
And it touched her pure brow to a heavenly light.
"In the name of your husband, dear lady," she said;
"In the name of your mother, take heart! Lift your head,
For those blushes are noble. Alas! do not trust
To that maxim of virtue made ashes and dust,
That the fault of the husband can cancel the wife's.
Take heart! and take refuge and strength in your life's
Pure silence, — there, kneel, pray, and hope, weep, and wait!"
"Saved, Lucile!" sobbed Matilda, "but saved to what fate?
Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes."
"Hush!" the sweet voice replied.
"Fooled away by a fancy, again to your side
Must your husband return. Doubt not this. And return
For the love you can give, with the love that you yearn
To receive, lady. What was it chilled you both now?
Not the absence of love, but the ignorance how
Love is nourished by love. Well! henceforth you will prove
Your heart worthy of love, — since it knows how to love."

XIII.

"What gives you such power over me, that I feel
Thus drawn to obey you? What are you, Lucile?"
Sighed Matilda, and lifted her eyes to the face
Of Lucile.
There passed suddenly through it the trace
Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair forehead came down
A shadow which yet was too sweet for a frown.
"The pupil of sorrow, perchance" . . . she replied.
"Of sorrow?" Matilda exclaimed . . . "O confide
To my heart your affliction. In all you made known
I should find some instruction, no doubt, for my own!"

"And I some consolation, no doubt; for the tears
Of another have not flowed for me many years."

It was then that Matilda herself seized the hand
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her; and
Thus together they entered the house.

XIV.

'T was the room
Of Matilda.
The languid and delicate gloom
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft
From the ceiling suspended, around it slept soft.
The casement oped into the garden. The pale
Cool moonlight streamed through it. One lone nightingale
Sung aloof in the laurels.
And here, side by side,
Hand in hand, the two women sat down undescried,
Save by guardian angels.
As, when, sparkling yet
From the rain, that, with drops that are jewels, leaves wet
The bright head it humbles, a young rose inclines
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision shines
As one flower with two faces, in hushed, tearful speech,
Like the showery whispers of flowers, each to each
Linked, and leaning together, so loving, so fair,
So united, yet diverse, the two women there
Looked, indeed, like two flowers upon one drooping stem,
In the soft light that tenderly rested on them.
All that soul said to soul in that chamber, who knows?
All that heart gained from heart?
Leave the lily, the rose,
Undisturbed with their secret within them. For who
To the heart of the floweret can follow the dew?
A night full of stars! O'er the silence, unseen,
The footsteps of sentinel angels, between
The dark land and deep sky were moving. You heard
Passed from earth up to heaven the happy watchword
Which brightened the stars as amongst them it fell
From earth's heart, which it eased . . . "All is well! all is well!"

CANTO IV.

I.

The Poets pour wine; and, when 't is new, all decry it,
But, once let it be old, every trifler must try it.
And Polonius, who praises no wine that 's not Massic,
Complains of my verse, that my verse is not classic.
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not badly,
My earlier verses, sighs "Commonplace sadly!"

As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but slightly;
But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so brightly
In despite of their languishing looks, on my word,

That to see you look cross I can scarcely afford.
Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on a bard
Better far than Longinus himself can reward
The appeal to her feelings of which she approves;
And the critics I most care to please are the Loves.

Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at his head
And a brass on his breast, — when a man is once dead?
Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor guerdon were then
Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand forth models for men.
The reformer's? — a creed by posterity learnt
A century after its author is burnt!
The poet's? — a laurel that hides the bald brow
It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask Raphael now
Which Madonna's authentic! The statesman's? — a name
For parties to blacken, or boys to declaim!
The soldier's? — three lines on the cold Abbey pavement!
Were this all the life of the wise and the brave meant,
All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it were
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous hair,
Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the shade
And be loved, while the roses yet bloom overhead,
Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think the long thought,
A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied for naught
Save the name of John Milton! For all men, indeed,
Who in some choice edition may graciously read,
With fair illustration, and erudite note,
The song which the poet in bitterness wrote,
Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in this —
The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst they miss
The grief of the man: Tasso's song, — not his madness!
Dante's dreams, — not his waking to exile and sadness!
Milton's music, — but not Milton's blindness! . . .
Yet rise,
My Milton, and answer, with those noble eyes
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded to earth!
Say — the life, in the living it, savors of worth:
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches its aim:
That the fact has a value apart from the fame:
That a deeper delight, in the mere labor, pays
Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious days:
And Shakespeare, though all Shakespeare's writings were lost,
And his genius, though never a trace of it crossed
Posterity's path, not the less would have dwelt
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet have felt
All that Hamlet hath uttered, and haply where, pure
On its death-bed, wronged Love lay, have moaned with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon returned
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly burned
As though half out of humor to find itself there
Forced to light for no purpose a room that was bare.
He sat down by the window alone. Never yet
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore the new moon!
The dark world lay still, in a sort of sweet swoon,
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on the stream
Were trembling like eyes that are loved on the dream
Of a lover; and all things were glad and at rest

Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.
He endeavored to think, — an unwonted employment,
Which appeared to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

"Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,
Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,"
Wrote the tutor of Nero; who wrote, be it said,
Better far than he acted, — but peace to the dead!
He bled for his pupil: what more could he do?
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour
He sat with his head drooped like some stubborn flower
Beaten down by the rush of the rain, — with such force
Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course
Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,
From the cloud that had darkened the evening for him.
At one moment he rose, — rose and opened the door,
And wistfully looked down the dark corridor
Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with a sigh
Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly
Back again to his place in a sort of submission
To doubt, and returned to his former position, —
That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the face,
And the eye vaguely fixed on impalpable space.
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,
As once Circe the winds, had sealed thought; and his wife
And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses
Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had been
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,
Which was making some noise in the passage without.
A sound English voice, with a round English accent,
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back sent;
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver:
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot
Which revealed by its sound no diminutive foot:
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or
Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major
On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow
With a warmth for which only starvation and snow
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.
Then the two men sat down and scanned each other's faces;
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had shaken
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he descried,
At a glance, something wrong.

V.

"What 's the matter?" he cried.
"What have you to tell me?"

JOHN.

What! have you not heard?

ALFRED.

Heard what?

JOHN.

This sad business —

ALFRED.

I? no, not a word.

JOHN.

You received my last letter?

ALFRED.

I think so. If not,
What then?

JOHN.

You have acted upon it?

ALFRED.

On what?

JOHN.

The advice that I gave you —

ALFRED.

Advice? — let me see!
You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.
About Parliament was it?

JOHN.

Hang Parliament! no,
The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

ALFRED.

What Bank?

JOHN.

Heavens! I know
You are careless; — but surely you have not forgotten, —
Or neglected . . . I warned you the whole thing was rotten.
You have drawn those deposits at least?

ALFRED.

No, I meant
To have written to-day; but the note shall be sent
To-morrow, however.

JOHN.

To-morrow? too late!
Too late! O, what devil bewitched you to wait?

ALFRED.

Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .

JOHN.

Yes, I do.

ALFRED.

What! Sir Ridley? . . .

JOHN.

Smashed, broken, blown up, bolted too!

ALFRED.

But his own niece? . . . In heaven's name, Jack . . .

JOHN.

O, I told you
The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

ALFRED.

Hold! you
Surely can't mean we are ruined?

JOHN.

Sit down!
A fortnight ago a report about town
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!
I at once wrote and warned you. Well, now let that pass.
A run on the Bank about five days ago
Confirmed my forebodings too terribly, though.
I drove down to the city at once: found the door
Of the Bank close: the Bank had stopped payment at four.
Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:
Warrant out for MacNab; but MacNab was abroad:
Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavored to get
Information: have learned nothing certain as yet, —
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:
Or with those securities what he had done:
Or whether they had been already called out:

If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past a doubt.
Twenty families ruined, they say: what was left, —
Unable to find any clew to the cleft
The old fox ran to earth in, — but join you as fast
As I could, my dear Alfred? *

VI.

He stopped here, aghast
At the change in his cousin, the hue of whose face
Had grown livid; and glassy his eyes fixed on space.
"Courage, courage!" . . . said John, . . . "bear the blow like a man!"
And he caught the cold hand of Lord Alfred. There ran
Through that hand a quick tremor. "I bear it," he said,
"But Matilda? the blow is to her!" And his head
Seemed forced down, as he said it.

JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!
I half think I know the girl better than you.
She has courage enough — and to spare. She cares less
Than most women for luxury, nonsense, and dress.

ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it:
If you did not avert, you may help her to bear it.

ALFRED.

I might have averted.

JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now
There is clearly no use in considering how,
Or whence, came the mischief. The mischief is here.
Broken shins are not mended by crying, — that's clear!
One has but to rub them, and get up again,
And push on, — and not think too much of the pain.
And at least it is much that you see that to her
You owe too much to think of yourself. You must stir
And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her sake. Who knows?
Something yet may be saved from this wreck. I suppose
We shall make him disgorge all he can, at the least.

"O Jack, I have been a brute idiot! a beast!
A fool! I have sinned, and to *her* I have sinned!
I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably blind!
And now, in a flash, I see all things!"
As though
To shut out the vision, he bowed his head low
On his hands; and the great tears in silence rolled on,
And fell momently, heavily, one after one.
John felt no desire to find instant relief
For the trouble he witnessed.
He guessed, in the grief
Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt admission
Of some error demanding a heartfelt contrition:
Some oblivion perchance which could plead less excuse
To the heart of a man re-aroused to the use
Of the conscience God gave him, than simply and merely
The neglect for which now he was paying so dearly.
So he rose without speaking, and paced up and down
The long room, much afflicted, indeed, in his own
Cordial heart for Matilda.
Thus, silently lost
In his anxious reflections, he crossed and recrossed

* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,
Took place when Bad News as yet travelled by horse.
Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzzed on a wire,
Or Time was calcined by electrical fire;
Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,
Or the word Telegram drove grammarians frantic.

"He bowed his head low
On his hands." Page 110.

The place where his cousin yet hopelessly hung
O'er the table; his fingers entwisted among
The rich curls they were knotting and dragging: and there,
That sound of all sounds the most painful to hear,
The sobs of a man! Yet so far in his own
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he already had grown
Unconscious of Alfred.
And so for a space
There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face
He stopped short, and bent on his cousin awhile
A pained sort of wistful, compassionate smile,
Approached him, — stood o'er him, — and suddenly laid
One hand on his shoulder —
"Where is she?" he said.
Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with tears
And gazed vacantly at him, like one that appears
In some foreign language to hear himself greeted,
Unable to answer.
"Where is she?" repeated
His cousin.
He motioned his hand to the door;
"There, I think," he replied. Cousin John said no more,
And appeared to relapse to his own cogitations,
Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indications.
So again there was silence.
A timepiece at last
Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.
Roused by them, he cast
A half-look to the dial; then quietly threw
His arm round the neck of his cousin, and drew
The hands down from his face.
"It is time she should know
What has happened," he said, . . . "let us go to her now."
Alfred started at once to his feet.
Drawn and wan
Though his face, he looked more than his wont was — a man.
Strong for once, in his weakness. Uplifted, filled through
With a manly resolve.
If that axiom be true
Of the "*Sum quia cogito*," I must opine
That "*id sum quod cogito*": — that which, in fine,
A man thinks and feels, with his whole force of thought
And feeling, the man is himself.
He had fought
With himself, and rose up from his self-overthrow
The survivor of much which that strife had laid low.
At his feet, as he rose at the name of his wife,
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized life
Which, though yet unfulfilled, seemed till then, in that name,
To be his, had he claimed it. The man's dream of fame
And of power fell shattered before him; and only
There rested the heart of the woman, so lonely
In all save the love he could give her. The lord
Of that heart he arose. Blush not, Muse, to record
That his first thought, and last, at that moment was not
Of the power and fame that seemed lost to his lot,
But the love that was left to it; not of the pelf
He had cared for, yet squandered; and not of himself,
But of her; as he murmured,
"One moment, dear Jack!
We have grown up from boyhood together. Our track
Has been through the same meadows in childhood: in youth
Through the same silent gateways, to manhood. In truth,
There is none that can know me as you do; and none
To whom I more wish to believe myself known.
Speak the truth; you are not wont to mince it, I know.
Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it now.
In despite of a wanton behavior, in spite

Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might
Have turned from me many a heart strong and true
As your own, I have never turned round and missed YOU
From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt
By my own blind and heedless self-will brought about.
Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake
Of those old recollections of boyhood that make
In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal
From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but feel
Might have sentenced our friendship to death long ago?
Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)
That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,
Your heart has divined in me something superior
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature
Not wholly expelled by the world's usurpature?
Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire
For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire
Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust
Which life hath heaped o'er it? Some one fact to trust
And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deemed
The mere frivolous fool I so often have seemed
To my own self?"

JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe,
Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve
For having belied your true nature so long.
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!

"Do you think," he resumed . . . "what I feel while I speak
Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak
As these weak tears would seem to betoken it?"

JOHN.

No!

ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then. And now I will go
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

JOHN.

I do. But 't is late.
If she sleeps, you 'll not wake her.

ALFRED.

No, no! it will wait
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-morrow.
He opened the door, and passed out. Cousin John
Watched him wistful, and left him to seek her alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knocked at her door,
He could hear no reply from within. Yet once more
He knocked lightly. No answer. The handle he tried:
The door opened: he entered the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circlet of light
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the night,
The pale lamp and indistinct radiance shed
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy bed
Matilda was kneeling; so wrapt in deep prayer
That she knew not her husband stood watching her there.
With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a faint
And unearthly effulgence which seemed to acquaint
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made secure
By the presence of something angelic and pure.
And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the tomb

Where Love lies, than the lady that kneeled in that gloom.
She had put off her dress; and she looked to his eyes
Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise;
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,
And over them rippled her soft golden hair;
Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced
Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.
As the light that, from water reflected, forever
Trembles up through the tremulous reeds of a river,
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,
Through the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and dim,
Reproducing itself in the broken and bright
Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.
That sight
Bowed his heart, bowed his knee. Knowing scarce what he did,
To her side through the chamber he silently slid,
And knelt down beside her, — and prayed at her side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried
That her husband was near her; suffused with the blush
Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush
Where the tears sparkled yet.
As a young fawn uncouches,
Shy with fear, from the fern where some hunter approaches,
She shrank back; he caught her, and circling his arm
Round her waist, on her brow pressed one kiss long and warm.
Then her fear changed in impulse; and hiding her face
On his breast, she hung locked in a clinging embrace
With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as though
She feared, if their clasp were relaxed, he would go:
Her smooth naked shoulders, uncared for, convulsed
By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous minute.
"O Alfred, O Alfred! forgive me," she cried, —
"Forgive me!"
"Forgive you, my poor child!" he sighed;
"But I never have blamed you for aught that I know,
And I have not one thought that reproaches you now."
From her arms he unwound himself gently. And so
He forced her down softly beside him. Below
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.
And he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,
"When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at length,
That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,
But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own
The weakness which thus to himself hath been shown?
From whom seek the strength which his need of is sore,
Although in his pride he might perish, before
He could plead for the one, or the other avow
'Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me now,
Do you join me in feeling, in that darkened hour,
The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power
To be at his side, is the woman that shares
His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears
The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life
She has mingled her own with, — in short, that man's wife?"
"Yes," murmured Matilda, "O yes!"
"Then," he cried,
"This chamber in which we two sit, side by side

(And his arm, as he spoke, seemed more softly to press her),
Is now a confessional, — *you*, my confessor!"
"I?" she faltered, and timidly lifted her head.
"Yes! but first answer one other question," he said:
"When a woman once feels that she is not alone;
That the heart of another is warmed by her own;
That another feels with her whatever she feel,
And halves her existence in woe or in weal;
That a man for her sake will, so long as he lives,
Live to put forth his strength which the thought of her gives;
Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;
Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow:
Will that woman feel less than another, O say,
The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?
Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,
That they brighten the heart, though they darken the home?"
She turned, like a soft rainy heaven, on him
Eyes that smiled through fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.
"That woman," she murmured, "indeed were thrice blest!"
"Then courage, true wife of my heart!" to his breast
As he folded and gathered her closely, he cried.
"For the refuge, to-night in these arms opened wide
To your heart, can be never closed to it again,
And this room is for both an asylum! For when
I passed through that door, at the door I left there
A calamity, sudden, and heavy to bear.
One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,
We must face it henceforth: but it enters not here,
For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone
A heart which calamity leaves all your own!"
She started . . . "Calamity, Alfred! to you?"
"To both, my poor child, but 't will bring with it too
The courage, I trust, to subdue it."
"O speak!
Speak!" she faltered in tones timid, anxious, and weak.
"O yet for a moment," he said, "hear me on!
Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,
Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,
That sport in the sunbeam, and play through the skies
While the skies smile, and heed not each other: at last,
When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky overcast,
Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings?
So indeed the morn found us, — poor frivolous things!
Now our sky is o'ercast, and our sunbeam is set,
And the night brings its darkness around us. O, yet,
Have we weathered no storm through those twelve cloudless hours?
Yes; you, too, have wept!
"While the world was yet ours,
While its sun was upon us, its incense streamed to us,
And its myriad voices of joy seemed to woo us,
We strayed from each other, too far, it may be,
Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see
How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how great
Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate!
But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,
Watching o'er us, to warn, and to rescue!
"That smile
Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you eyed
With resentment, an angel's they were at your side
And at mine; nor perchance is the day all so far,
When we both in our prayers, when most heartfelt they are,

May murmur the name of that woman now gone
From our sight evermore.
"Here, this evening, alone,
I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart
Unto yours, — from this clasp be it never to part!
Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,
But a prize richer far than that fortune has won
It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,
'T is the heart of my wife!" With suffused happy eyes
She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide apart,
And tenderly closing them round him, his heart
Clasped in one close embrace to her bosom; and there
Drooped her head on his shoulder; and sobbed.
Not despair,
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,
Flowed in those happy tears, so oblivious she was
Of all save the sense of her own love! Anon,
However, his words rushed back to her.
"All gone,
The fortune you brought me!"
And eyes that were dim
With soft tears she upraised: but those tears were for *him*.
"Gone! my husband?" she said, "tell me all! see! I need,
To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,
Fuller sense of affliction."
"Poor innocent child!"
He kissed her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled,
As he told her the tale he had heard, — something more
The gain found in loss of what gain lost of yore.
"Rest, my heart, and my brain, and my right hand for you;
And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do?
You know not, I knew not myself till this hour,
Which so sternly revealed it, my nature's full power."
"And I too," she murmured, "I too am no more
The mere infant at heart you have known me before.
I have suffered since then. I have learned much in life.
O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,
The heart I have learned as a woman to feel!
For I — love you, my husband!"
As though to conceal
Less from him, than herself, what that motion expressed,
She dropped her bright head, and hid all on his breast.
"O lovely as woman, belovéd as wife!
Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!
If from eyes fixed too long on this base earth thus far
You have missed your due homage, dear guardian star,
Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,
There I see you, and know you, and bless the light given
To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,
My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!"

XII.

How lovely she looked in the lovely moonlight,
That streamed through the pane from the blue balmy night!
How lovely she looked in her own lovely youth,
As she clung to his side full of trust, and of truth!
How lovely to *him* as he tenderly pressed
Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caressed
The glittering tresses which now shaken loose
Showered gold in his hand, as he smoothed them!

XIII.

O Muse,
Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart
'Twixt these two silent souls! There 's a joy beyond art,
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were happy at least!
No music, save such as the nightingales sung,
Breathed their bridals abroad; and no cresset, uphung,
Lit that festival hour, save what soft light was given
From the pure stars that peopled the deep-purple heaven.
He opened the casement: he led her with him,
Hushed in heart, to the terrace, dipped cool in the dim
Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels. They heard
Aloof the invisible, rapturous bird,
With her wild note bewildering the woodlands: they saw
Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet draw
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets with cheer
From the throat of the vale; o'er the dark-sapphire sphere
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright as the sheep
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace; from unknown
Hollow glooms freshened odors around them were blown
Intermittingly; then the moon dropped from their sight,
Immersed in the mountains, and put out the light
Which no longer they needed to read on the face
Of each other's life's last revelation. The place
Slept sumptuous round them; and Nature, that never
Sleeps, but waking reposes, with patient endeavor
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the green
Summer silence, preparing new buds for new blossoms,
And stealing a finger of change o'er the bosoms
Of the unconscious woodlands; and Time, that halts not
His forces, how lovely soever the spot
Where their march lies, — the wary, gray strategist, Time,
With the armies of Life, lay encamped, — Grief and Crime,
Love and Faith, in the darkness unheeded; maturing,
For his great war with man, new surprises; securing
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his foe
To his last narrow refuge, — the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of heaven, and sweetly
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all things, completely
Confiding in that yet untrodden existence
Over which they were pausing. To-morrow, resistance
And struggle; to-night, Love his hallowed device
Hung forth, and proclaimed his serene armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

When Lucile left Matilda, she sat for long hours
In her chamber, fatigued by long overwrought powers,
'Mid the signs of departure, about to turn back
To her old vacant life, on her old homeless track.
She felt her heart falter within her. She sat
Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly at
The insignia of royalty worn for a night;
Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle and light,
And the effort of passionate feigning; who thinks
Of her own meagre, rush-lighted garret, and shrinks
From the chill of the change that awaits her.

II.

From these
Oppressive, and comfortless, blank reveries,
Unable to sleep, she descended the stair
That led from her room to the garden.

The air,
With the chill of the dawn, yet unrisen, but at hand,
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead. The land
Lay in darkness and change, like a world in its grave:
No sound, save the voice of the long river wave,
And the crickets that sing all the night! She stood still,
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that curled on the hill.
Emotions, long pent in her breast, were at stir,
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled in her.
Ah, pale woman! what, with that heart-broken look,
Didst thou read then in nature's weird heart-breaking book?
Have the wild rains of heaven a father? and who
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the dew?
Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both?
What leads forth in his season the bright Mazaroth?
Hath the darkness a dwelling, — save there, in those eyes?
And what name hath that half-revealed hope in the skies?
Ay, question, and listen! What answer?
The sound
Of the long river wave through its stone-troubled bound,
And the crickets that sing all the night.
There are hours
Which belong to unknown, supernatural powers,
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions are all
That to this race of worms — stinging creatures, that crawl,
Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath their own stings —
Can excuse the blind boast of inherited wings.
When the soul, on the impulse of anguish, hath passed
Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture at last;
When she traverses nature and space, till she stands
In the Chamber of Fate; where, through tremulous hands,
Hum the threads from an old-fashioned distaff uncurled,
And those three blind old women sit spinning the world.

III.

The dark was blanched wan, overhead. One green star
Was slipping from sight in the pale void afar;
The spirits of change, and of awe, with faint breath
Were shifting the midnight, above and beneath.
The spirits of awe and of change were around,
And about, and upon her.
A dull muffled sound,
And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly surprise,
And she felt herself fixed by the hot hollow eyes
Of the Frenchman before her: those eyes seemed to burn,
And scorch out the darkness between them, and turn
Into fire as they fixed her. He looked like the shade
Of a creature by fancy from solitude made,
And sent forth by the darkness to scare and oppress
Some soul of a monk in a waste wilderness.

IV.

"At last, then, — at last, and alone, — I and thou,
Lucile de Nevers, have we met?
"Hush! I know
Not for me was the tryst. Never mind! it is mine;
And whatever led hither those proud steps of thine,
They remove not, until we have spoken. My hour
Is come; and it holds thee and me in its power,
As the darkness holds both the horizons. 'T is well!
The timidest maiden that e'er to the spell
Of her first lover's vows listened, hushed with delight,
When soft stars were brightly uphanging the night,
Never listened, I swear, more unquestioningly,

Than thy fate hath compelled thee to
listen to me!"
To the sound of his voice, as though out
of a dream,
She appeared with a start to awaken.
The stream,
When he ceased, took the night with its
moaning again,
Like the voices of spirits departing in
pain.
"Continue," she answered, "I listen to
hear."
For a moment he did not reply.
Through the drear
And dim light between them, she saw
that his face
Was disturbed. To and fro he contin-
ued to pace,
With his arms folded close, and the low
restless stride
Of a panther, in circles around her, first
wide,
Then narrower, nearer, and quicker.
At last
He stood still, and one long look upon
her he cast.
"Lucile, dost thou dare to look into
my face?
Is the sight so repugnant? ha, well!
Canst thou trace
One word of thy writing in this wicked
scroll,
With thine own name scrawled through
it, defacing a soul?"
In his face there was something so wrath-
ful and wild,
That the sight of it scared her.
He saw it, and smiled,
And then turned him from her, renewing
again
That short, restless stride; as though
searching in vain
For the point of some purpose within
him.
"Lucile,
You shudder to look in my face: do you
feel
No reproach when you look in your own
heart?"
"No, Duke,
In my conscience I do not deserve your
rebuke:
Not yours!" she replied.
"No," he muttered again,
"Gentle justice! you first bid Life hope
not, and then
To Despair you say 'Act not!'"

V.

He watched her awhile
With a chill sort of restless and suffering
smile.
They stood by the wall of the garden.
The skies,
Dark, sombre, were troubled with vague
prophecies
Of the dawn yet far distant. The moon
had long set,
And all in a glimmering light, pale, and
wet
With the night-dews, the white roses
sullenly loomed
Round about her. She spoke not. At
length he resumed.
"Wretched creatures we are! I and
thou, — one and all!
Only able to injure each other, and fall
Soon or late, in that void which our-
selves we prepare
For the souls that we boast of! weak
insects we are!
O heaven! and what has become of
them? all
Those instincts of Eden surviving the
Fall:
That glorious faith in inherited things:
That sense in the soul of the length of
her wings;
Gone! all gone! and the wail of the
night-wind sounds human,
Bewailing those once nightly visitants!
Woman,
Woman, what hast thou done with my
youth? Give again,
Give me back the young heart that I
gave thee . . . in vain!"
"Duke!" she faltered.
"Yes, yes!" he went on, "I was not
Always thus! what I once was, I have
not forgot."

VI.

As the wind that heaps sand in a desert, there stirred
Through his voice an emotion that swept every word
Into one angry wail; as, with feverish change,
He continued his monologue, fitful and strange.
"Woe to him, in whose nature, once kindled, the torch
Of Passion burns downward to blacken and scorch!

But shame, shame and sorrow, O woman, to thee
Whose hand sowed the seed of destruction in me!
Whose lip taught the lesson of falsehood to mine!
Whose looks made me doubt lies that looked so divine!
My soul by thy beauty was slain in its sleep:
And if tears I mistrust,—'t is that thou too canst weep!
Well! . . . how utter soever it be, one mistake
In the love of a man, what more change need it make
In the steps of his soul through the course love began,
Than all other mistakes in the life of a man?
And I said to myself, 'I am young yet: too young
To have wholly survived my own portion among
The great needs of man's life, or exhausted its joys;
What is broken? one only of youth's pleasant toys!
Shall I be the less welcome, wherever I go,
For one passion survived? No! the roses will blow
As of yore, as of yore will the nightingales sing,
Not less sweetly for one blossom cancelled from Spring!
Hast thou loved, O my heart? to thy love yet remains
All the wide loving-kindness of nature. The plains
And the hills with each summer their verdure renew.
Wouldst thou be as they are? do thou then as they do,
Let the dead sleep in peace. Would the living divine
Where they slumber? Let only new flowers be the sign!

"Vain! all vain! . . . For when, laughing, the wine I would quaff,
I remembered too well all it cost me to laugh.
Through the revel it was but the old song I heard,
Through the crowd the old footsteps behind me they stirred,
In the night-wind, the starlight, the murmurs of even,
In the ardors of earth, and the languors of heaven,
I could trace nothing more, nothing more through the spheres,
But the sound of old sobs, and the tracks of old tears!
It was with me the night long in dreaming or waking,
It abided in loathing, when daylight was breaking,
The burden of the bitterness in me! Behold,
All my days were become as a tale that is told.
And I said to my sight, 'No good thing shalt thou see,
For the noonday is turnéd to darkness in me.
In the house of Oblivion my bed I have made.'
And I said to the grave, 'Lo, my father!' and said
To the worm, 'Lo, my sister!' The dust to the dust,
And one end to the wicked shall be with the just!"

VII.

He ceased, as a wind that wails out on the night,
And moans itself mute. Through the indistinct light
A voice clear, and tender, and pure with a tone
Of ineffable pity replied to his own.
"And say you, and deem you, that I wrecked your life?
Alas! Duc de Luvois, had I been your wife
By a fraud of the heart which could yield you alone
For the love in your nature a lie in my own,
Should I not, in deceiving, have injured you worse?
Yes, I then should have merited justly your curse,
For I then should have wronged you!"
"Wronged! ah, is it so?
You could never have loved me?"
"Duke!"
"Never? O no!"
(He broke into a fierce, angry laugh, as he said)

"Yet, lady, you knew that I loved you: you led
My love on to lay to its heart, hour by hour,
All the pale, cruel, beautiful, passionless power
Shut up in that cold face of yours! was this well?
But enough! not on you would I vent the wild hell
Which has grown in my heart. O that man, first and last
He tramples in triumph my life! he has cast
His shadow 'twixt me and the sun . . . let it pass!
My hate yet may find him!"
She murmured, "Alas!
These words, at least, spare me the pain of reply.
Enough, Duc de Luvois! farewell. I shall try
To forget every word I have heard, every sight
That has grieved and appalled me in this wretched night
Which must witness our final farewell. May you, Duke,
Never know greater cause your own heart to rebuke
Than mine thus to wrong and afflict you have had!
Adieu!"
"Stay, Lucile, stay!" . . . he groaned, . . . "I am mad,
Brutalized, blind with pain! I know not what I said.
I meant it not. But" (he moaned, drooping his head)
"Forgive me! I — have I so wronged you, Lucile?
I . . . have I . . . forgive me, forgive me!"
"I feel
Only sad, very sad to the soul," she said, "far,
Far too sad for resentment."
"Yet stand as you are
One moment," he murmured. "I think, could I gaze
Thus awhile on your face, the old innocent days
Would come back upon me, and this scorching heart
Free itself in hot tears. Do not, do not depart
Thus, Lucile! stay one moment. I know why you shrink,
Why you shudder; I read in your face what you think.
Do not speak to me of it. And yet, if you will,
Whatever you say, my own lips shall be still.
I lied. And the truth, now, could justify naught.
There are battles, it may be, in which to have fought
Is more shameful than, simply, to fail. Yet, Lucile,
Had you helped me to bear what you forced me to feel —"
"Could I help you," she murmured, "but what can I say
That your life will respond to?" "My life?" he sighed. "Nay,
My life hath brought forth only evil, and there
The wild wind hath planted the wild weed: yet ere
You exclaim, 'Fling the weed to the flames,' think again
Why the field is so barren. With all other men
First love, though it perish from life, only goes
Like the primrose that falls to make way for the rose.
For a man, at least most men, may love on through life:
Love in fame; love in knowledge; in work: earth is rife
With labor, and therefore with love, for a man.
If one love fails, another succeeds, and the plan
Of man's life includes love in all objects! But I?
All such loves from my life through its whole destiny
Fate excluded. The love that I gave you, alas!
Was the sole love that life gave to me. Let that pass!
It perished, and all perished with it. Ambition?
Wealth left nothing to add to my social condition.
Fame? But fame in itself presupposes some great
Field wherein to pursue and attain it. The State?
I, to cringe to an upstart? The Camp? I, to draw

From its sheath the old sword of the Dukes of Luvois
To defend usurpation? Books, then? Science, Art?
But, alas! I was fashioned for action: my heart,
Withered thing though it be, I should hardly compress
'Twixt the leaves of a treatise on Statics: life's stress
Needs scope, not contraction! what rests? to wear out
At some dark northern court an existence, no doubt,
In wretched and paltry intrigues for a cause
As hopeless as is my own life! By the laws
Of a fate I can neither control nor dispute,
I am what I am!"

VIII.

For a while she was mute.
Then she answered, "We are our own fates. Our own deeds
Are our doomsmen. Man's life was made not for men's creeds,
But men's actions. And, Duc de Luvois, I might say
That all life attests, that 'the will makes the way.'
Is the land of our birth less the land of our birth,
Or its claim the less strong, or its cause the less worth
Our upholding, because the white lily no more
Is as sacred as all that it bloomed for of yore?
Yet be that as it may be; I cannot perchance
Judge this matter. I am but a woman, and France
Has for me simpler duties. Large hope, though, Eugène
De Luvois, should be yours. There is purpose in pain,
Otherwise it were devilish. I trust in my soul
That the great master hand which sweeps over the whole
Of this deep harp of life, if at moments it stretch
To shrill tension some one wailing nerve, means to fetch
Its response the truest, most stringent, and smart,
Its pathos the purest, from out the wrung heart,
Whose faculties, flaccid it may be, if less
Sharply strung, sharply smitten, had failed to express
Just the one note the great final harmony needs.
And what best proves there's life in a heart? — that it bleeds!
Grant a cause to remove, grant an end to attain,
Grant both to be just, and what mercy in pain!
Cease the sin with the sorrow! See morning begin!
Pain must burn itself out if not fuelled by sin.
There is hope in yon hill-tops, and love in yon light.
Let hate and despondency die with the night!"

He was moved by her words. As some poor wretch confined
In cells loud with meaningless laughter, whose mind
Wanders trackless amidst its own ruins, may hear
A voice heard long since, silenced many a year,
And now, 'mid mad ravings recaptured again,
Singing through the caged lattice a once well-known strain,
Which brings back his boyhood upon it, until
The mind's ruined crevices graciously fill
With music and memory, and, as it were,
The long-troubled spirit grows slowly aware
Of the mockery round it, and shrinks from each thing
It once sought, — the poor idiot who passed for a king,
Hard by, with his squalid straw crown, now confessed
A madman more painfully mad than the rest, —
So the sound of her voice, as it there wandered o'er
His echoing heart, seemed in part to restore
The forces of thought: he recaptured the whole

Of his life by the light which, in passing, her soul
Reflected on his: he appeared to awake
From a dream, and perceived he had dreamed a mistake:
His spirit was softened, yet troubled in him:
He felt his lips falter, his eyesight grow dim,
But he murmured . . .
"Lucile, not for me that sun's light
Which reveals — not restores — the wild havoc of night.
There are some creatures born for the night, not the day.
Broken-hearted the nightingale hides in the spray,
And the owl's moody mind in his own hollow tower
Dwells muffled. Be darkness henceforward my dower.
Light, be sure, in that darkness there dwells, by which eyes
Grown familiar with ruins may yet recognize
Enough desolation."

IX.

"The pride that claims here
On earth to itself (howsoever severe
To itself it may be) God's dread office and right
Of punishing sin, is a sin in heaven's sight,
And against heaven's service.
"Eugène de Luvois,
Leave the judgment to Him who alone knows the law.
Surely no man can be his own judge, least of all
His own doomsman."
Her words seemed to fall
With the weight of tears in them.
He looked up, and saw
That sad serene countenance, mournful as law
And tender as pity, bowed o'er him: and heard
In some thicket the matinal chirp of a bird.

X.

"Vulgar natures alone suffer vainly.
"Eugène,"
She continued, "in life we have met once again,
And once more life parts us. Yon day-spring for me
Lifts the veil of a future in which it may be
We shall meet nevermore. Grant, O grant to me yet
The belief that it is not in vain we have met!
I plead for the future. A new horoscope
I would cast: will you read it? I plead for a hope:
I plead for a memory; yours, yours alone,
To restore or to spare. Let the hope be your own,
Be the memory mine.
"Once of yore, when for man
Faith yet lived, ere this age of the slug-gard began,
Men, aroused to the knowledge of evil, fled far
From the fading rose-gardens of sense, to the war
With the Pagan, the cave in the desert, and sought
Not repose, but employment in action or thought,
Life's strong earnest, in all things! O think not of me,
But yourself! for I plead for your own destiny:
I plead for your life, with its duties undone,
With its claims unappeased, and its trophies unwon;
And in pleading for life's fair fulfilment, I plead
For all that you miss, and for all that you need."

XI.

Through the calm crystal air, faint and far, as she spoke,
A clear, chilly chime from a church-turret broke;
And the sound of her voice, with the sound of the bell,
On his ear, where he kneeled, softly, soothingly fell.
All within him was wild and confused, as within
A chamber deserted in some roadside inn,
Where, passing, wild travellers paused, over-night,
To quaff and carouse; in each socket each light
Is extinct; crashed the glasses, and scrawled is the wall

With wild ribald ballads: serenely o'er all,
For the first time perceived, where the dawn-light creeps faint
Through the wrecks of that orgy, the face of a saint,
Seen through some broken frame, appears noting meanwhile
The ruin all round with a sorrowful smile.
And he gazed round. The curtains of Darkness half drawn
Oped behind her; and pure as the pure light of dawn,
She stood, bathed in morning, and seemed to his eyes
From their sight to be melting away in the skies
That expanded around her.

XII.

There passed through his head
A fancy, — a vision. That woman was dead
He had loved long ago, — loved and lost! dead to him,
Dead to all the life left him; but there, in the dim
Dewy light of the dawn, stood a spirit; 't was hers;
And he said to the soul of Lucile de Nevers:
"O soul to its sources departing away!
Pray for mine, if one soul for another may pray.
I to ask have no right, thou to give hast no power,
One hope to my heart. But in this parting hour
I name not my heart, and I speak not to thine.
Answer, soul of Lucile, to this dark soul of mine,
Does not soul owe to soul, what to heart heart denies,
Hope, when hope is salvation? Behold, in yon skies,
This wild night is passing away while I speak:
Lo, above us, the day-spring beginning to break!
Something wakens within me, and warms to the beam.
Is it hope that awakens? or do I but dream?
I know not. It may be, perchance, the first spark
Of a new light within me to solace the dark
Unto which I return; or perchance it may be
The last spark of fires half extinguished in me.
I know not. Thou goest thy way: I my own:
For good or for evil, I know not. Alone
This I know; we are parting. I wished to say more,
But no matter! 't will pass. All between us is o'er.
Forget the wild words of to-night. 'T was the pain
For long years hoarded up, that rushed from me again.
I was unjust: forgive me. Spare now to reprove
Other words, other deeds. It was madness, not love,
That you thwarted this night. What is done is now done.
Death remains to avenge it, or life to atone.
I was maddened, delirious! I saw you return
To him — not to me; and I felt my heart burn
With a fierce thirst for vengeance — and thus . . . let it pass!
Long thoughts these, and so brief the moments, alas!
Thou goest thy way, and I mine. I suppose
'T is to meet nevermore. Is it not so? Who knows,
Or who heeds, where the exile from Paradise flies?
Or what altars of his in the desert may rise?
Is it not so, Lucile? Well, well! Thus then we part
Once again, soul from soul, as before heart from heart!"

XIII.

And again, clearer far than the chime of the bell,
That voice on his sense softly, soothingly fell.
"Our two paths must part us, Eugène; for my own
Seems no more through that world in which henceforth alone
You must work out (as now I believe that you will)

The hope which you speak of. That work I shall still
(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.
Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I say,
That the great moral combat between human life
And each human soul must be single. The strife
None can share, though by all its results may be known.
When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.
I say not, indeed, we shall meet nevermore,
For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,
I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet
By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the street,
Or in solitude even, but never again
Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met, Eugène.
For we know not the way we are going, nor yet
Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life hath set
No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,
I will promise : whatever your path, or my own,
If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance
That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and lance
Lost or shattered, borne down by the stress of the war,
You falter and hesitate, if from afar
I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)
O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see
That my presence could rescue, support you, or guide,
In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,
To warn, if you will, or incite, or control ;
And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul ! "

XIV.

The voice ceased.
He uplifted his eyes.
All alone
He stood on the bare edge of dawn.
She was gone,
Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.
And at once, in her place, was the Sunrise ! It rose
In its sumptuous splendor and solemn repose,
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,
Realms of rose, in the Orient ! And breathless, and bold,
While the great gates of heaven rolled back one by one,
The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun !
Thrice holy Eospheros ! Light's reign began
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the man.
The dawn on the mountains ! the dawn everywhere !
Light ! silence ! the fresh innovations of air !
O earth, and O ether ! A butterfly breeze
Floated up, fluttered down, and poised blithe on the trees.
Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp-rippled stream,
Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill-slope,
The spirits of morning were whispering, "*Hope !*"

XV.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she stood
But a moment before, and where now rolled the flood
Of the sunrise all golden, he seemed to behold,
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold
Of his own youth, — its ardors, — its promise of fame, —
Its ancestral ambition ; and France by the name
Of his sires seemed to call him. There, hovered in light,
That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright
And Aurorean clouds, which themselves seemed to be

Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he
Had once dwelt, a native! There, rooted and bound
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it! Around
The rims of the sunrise it hovered and shone
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone;
And he, — as the body may yearn for the soul,
So he yearned to embody that image. His whole
Heart arose to regain it. "And is it too late?"
No! For time is a fiction, and limits not fate.
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to regain
The pure source of spirit, there *is* no TOO LATE.
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him
Arose to that image. The image waned dim
Into heaven; and heavenward with it, to melt
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense, — awed, amazed, —
Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

CANTO VI.

I.

MAN is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks
That have shattered creation, and shapen it, rocks.
He leaps with a wail into being; and lo!
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head:
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes: her solitudes spread
To daunt him: her forces dispute his command:
Her snows fall to freeze him: her suns burn to brand:
Her seas yawn to engulf him: her rocks rise to crush:
And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush
On their startled invader. In lone Malabar,
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,
'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw
(Striped and spotted destroyers!) he sees, pale with awe,
On the menacing edge of a fiery sky
Grim Doorga, blue-limbed and red-handed, go by,
And the first thing he worships is Terror. Anon,
Still impelled by necessity hungrily on,
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.
From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul:
Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll!
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high on
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion:
And man, conquering Terror, is worshipped by man.

A camp has this world been since first it began!
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian; at peace,
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece;
But, warring his way through a world's destinies,
Lo, from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise
Domes of empiry, dowered with science and art,
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart!

New realms to man's soul have been conquered. But those,

Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her own,
And bold must the man be that braves the Unknown!
Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
But brows have ached for it, and souls toiled and striven;
And many have striven, and many have failed,
And many died, slain by the truth they assailed.
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his place
And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face
With a new foe, — himself!
Nor may man on his shield
Ever rest, for his foe is forever afield,
Danger ever at hand, till the armèd Archangel
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of pleasure,
Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the measure!
Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me
One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee
Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,
Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime
In the light of the aureole over her head,
Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh and red.
Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold
The shrill clanging curtains of war!
And behold
A vision!
The antique Heraclean seats;
And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those fleets,
Which said to the winds, "Be ye, too, Genoese!"
And the red angry sands of the chafed Chersonese;
And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied
Round the Armies of England and France, side by side
Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast!)
Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the East.

III.

Since that sunrise, which rose through the calm linden stems
O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden at Ems,
Through twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,
This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,
And the fates that I sing of have flowed with the fates
Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates
Of that doomed and heroical city, in which
(Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the ditch!)
At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,
Whom the huntsmen have hemmed round at last in his lair.

IV.

A fanged, arid plain, sapped with underground fire,
Soaked with snow, torn with shot, mashed to one gory mire!
There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,
While those two famished ogres, — the Siege, the Defence,
Face to face, through a vapor frore, dismal, and dun,
Glare, scenting the breath of each other.
The one
Double-bodied, two-headed, — by separate ways
Winding, serpent-wise, nearer; the other, each day's
Sullen toil adding size to, — concentrated, solid,
Indefatigable, — the brass-fronted, embodied,
And audible αυτος gone sombrely forth
To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north!

V.

In the dawn of a moody October, a pale

Ghostly motionless vapor began to prevail
Over city and camp; like the garment of death
Which (is formed by) the face it conceals.
'T was the breath
War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;
Wherethrough, here and there, flashed an eye of red fire,
And closed, from some rampart beginning to bellow
Hoarse challenge; replied to anon, through the yellow
And sulphurous twilight: till day reeled and rocked,
And roared into dark. Then the midnight was mocked
With fierce apparitions. Ringed round by a rain
Of red fire, and of iron, the murtherous plain
Flared with fitful combustion; where fitfully fell
Afar off the fatal, disgorged *scharpenelle*,
And fired the horizon, and singed the coiled gloom
With wings of swift flame round that City of Doom.

VI.

So the day — so the night! So by night, so by day,
With stern patient pathos, while time wears away,
In the trench flooded through, in the wind where it wails,
In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails
Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and pain,
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze chain
Of those terrible siege-lines!
No change to that toil
Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous soil,
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the maimed,
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claimed
By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb,
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.
And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the brave:
And many a young heart has glutted the grave:
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous in story.

VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set: through the camp
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,
That seems searching for something it never can find.
The midnight is turning: the lamp is nigh spent:
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent
Lies a young British soldier whose sword . . .
In this place,
However, my Muse is compelled to retrace
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.
The shock which had suddenly shattered at last
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature,
Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature
The real man, concealed till that moment beneath
All he yet had appeared. From the gay broidered sheath
Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summoned forth by a blow.
And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.
The wife gained a husband, the husband a wife,
In that home which, though humbled and narrowed by fate,
Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their state,
But large their possessions.
Sir Ridley, forgiven
By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek speech

The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from reach
Of the law, died abroad.
Cousin John, heart and hand,
Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took his stand
By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and friend
Of the home he both shared and assured, to the end,
With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave meanwhile
Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's faithful smile.
Late in life he began life in earnest; and still,
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,
Through long, and laborious, and difficult days,
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,
Worked his way through the world; till at last he began
(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims from man),
After years of unwitnessed, unwearied endeavor,
Years impassioned yet patient, to realize ever
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion
The reflex of powers in himself, — that dominion
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his youth
In his manhood renewed, fame and fortune he won
Working only for home, love, and duty.
One son
Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank joy,
The darling of young soldier comrades, just glanced
Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it chanced
That a blight sharp and sudden was breathed o'er the bloom
Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:
No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,
Captious April engenders; but deep as his own
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.
When first a wild war-note through England was sent,
He, transferring without either token or word,
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,
Had marched forth, with eyes that saw death in the star
Whence others sought glory. Thus, fighting, he fell
On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell
By what miracle, breathing, though shattered, and borne
To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and torn.
Where for long days and nights, with the wound in his side,
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,
In the young heart was rankling; for there, of a truth,
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,
Lay ensheathed: and that love, ever fretting its sheath,
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore through and through.
There are loves in man's life for which time can renew
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, though, in love,
Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move,
Though earthquakes may shatter the shrine.
Whence or how
Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now.

X.

O, is it a phantom? a dream of the night?
A vision which fever hath fashioned to sight?

The wind wailing ever, with motion uncertain,
Sways sighingly there the drenched tent's tattered curtain,
To and fro, up and down.
But it is not the wind
That is lifting it now: and it is not the mind
That hath moulded that vision.
A pale woman enters,
As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concentres
Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dimmer
There, all in a slumberous and shadowy glimmer,
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands
By his bedside, all silent. She lays her white hands
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing
Softly, softly the sore wounds: the hot blood-stained dressing
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals
Through the racked weary frame: and, throughout it, he feels
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighborhood.
Something smooths the tossed pillow. Beneath a gray hood
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent o'er him,
And thrill through and through him. The sweet form before him,
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping!
A soft voice says . . . "Sleep!"
And he sleeps: he is sleeping.

XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there:
Still that pale woman moves not. A ministering care
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering
The aspect of all things around him.
Revering
Some power unknown and benignant, he blessed
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest
Having loosened the mind's tangled meshes, he faintly
Sighed . . . "Say what thou art, blesséd dream of a saintly
And ministering spirit!"
A whisper serene
Slid, softer than silence . . . "The Sœur Seraphine,
A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire
Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy sire,
For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.
Thou didst not shun death: shun not life. 'T is more brave
To live, than to die. Sleep!"
He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He wakened again, when the dawn was just steeping
The skies with chill splendor. And there, never flitting,
Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.
As the dawn to the darkness, so life seemed returning
Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp, yet burning,
Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.
He said,
"If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,
Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing
Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing
Thy mission of mercy! whence art thou?"
"O son
Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One
Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:
To thee, and to others, alive yet" . . . she said . . .
"So long as there liveth the poor gift in me
Of this ministration; to them, and to thee,
Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose vocation
Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation.
Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,
There her land! there her kindred!"

She bent down to smooth
The hot pillow; and added . . . "Yet more than another
Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,
I knew them, — I know them."
"O can it be? you!
My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,
You know them?"
She bowed, half averting, her head
In silence.
He brokenly, timidly said,
"Do they know I am thus?"
"Hush!" . . . she smiled, as she drew
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be true?
That beloved and familiar writing!
He burst
Into tears . . . "My poor mother — my father! the worst
Will have reached them!"
"No, no!" she exclaimed with a smile,
"They know you are living; they know that meanwhile
I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep not!"
But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot
Fevered brow of the boy weeping wildly is pressed.
There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:
And he hears, as it were between smiling and weeping,
The calm voice say . . . "Sleep!"
And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

XIII.

And day followed day. And, as wave follows wave,
With the tide, day by day, life, reissuing, drave
Through that young hardy frame novel currents of health.
Yet some strange obstruction, which life's self by stealth
Seemed to cherish, impeded life's progress. And still
A feebleness, less of the frame than the will,
Clung about the sick man: hid and harbored within
The sad hollow eyes: pinched the cheek pale and thin:
And clothed the wan fingers with languor.
And there,
Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,
And so gentle of hand, sat the Sœur Seraphine!

XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace
Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the whole
Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the soul
Seemed to fill with its own light, like some sunny fountain
Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain
That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,
And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.
So that, watching that face, you would scarce pause to guess
The years which its calm careworn lines might express,
Feeling only what suffering with these must have past
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out
His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,
The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own
Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone
Of her voice moved the silence.
She said . . . "I have healed
These wounds of the body. Why hast thou concealed,
Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?
Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?"
He winced, with a start,
As of one that is suddenly touched on the spot
From which every nerve derives suffering.
"What!
Lies my heart, then, so bare?" he moaned bitterly.

"Nay,"
With compassionate accents she hastened to say,
"Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow, young man,
So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan
Her features, yet know them not?
"O, was it spoken,
'*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the broken!*'
Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,
When we leave the bruised hearts, if we bind the bruised bone?
Nay, is not the mission of mercy two-fold?
Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers, that we hold
To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still
To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill
Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art
Helped of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.
Trust to me!" (His two feeble hands in her own
She drew gently.) "Trust to me!" (she said, with soft tone):
"I am not so dead in remembrance to all
I have died to in this world, but what I recall
Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,
To grieve for both, — save from both haply! The dial
Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.
Life's sorrows still fluctuate: God's love does not.
And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.
Looking up to this light, which is common to all,
And down to these shadows, on each side, that fall
In time's silent circle, so various for each,
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach
So far, but what light lies beyond them forever?
Trust to me! O, if in this hour I endeavor
To trace the shade creeping across the young life
Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watched through its strife
With the shadow of death, 't is with this faith alone,
That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.
Trust to me!"
She paused: he was weeping. Small need
Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,
Had those gentle accents to win from his pale
And parched, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief tale
Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,
And in words few as may be shall straightway be told.

XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace
Was driven from Europe, a young girl — the niece
Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile
By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a while
With a lady allied to her race, — an old dame
Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,
In the Faubourg Saint Germain.
Upon that fair child,
From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.
One uncle their place in her life had supplied,
And their place in her heart: she had grown at his side,
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,
From childhood to girlhood.
This fair orphan ward
Seemed the sole human creature that lived in the heart
Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could impart
One ray of response to the eyes which, above
Her fair infant forehead, looked down with a love
That seemed almost stern, so intense was its chill

Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the court-yard ; the chambers were bare
In that ancient mansion ; when first the stern tread
Of its owner awakened their echoes long dead :
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a brother),
Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother
Had placed on his bosom. 'T was said — right or wrong —
That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,
To which, as a stranger, its lord now returned,
In years yet recalled, through loud midnights had burned
The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wandered through
Those desolate chambers ; and calm and severe
Was the life of their inmate.
Men now saw appear
Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,
Which seemed to lock up in a cold iron case
Tears hardened to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,
His severity seemed to be trebly severe
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,
Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.
The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.
Yet he seemed in the midst of his good deeds to stand
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.
There appeared some inscrutable flaw in the plan
Of his life, that love failed to pass over.
That child
Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him ; smiled
To his frown, and dispelled it.
The sweet sportive elf
Seemed the type of some joy lost, and missed, in himself.
Ever welcome he suffered her glad face to glide
In on hours when to others his door was denied :
And many a time with a mute moody look
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had passed o'er that childhood before
A change came among them. A letter, which bore
Sudden consequence with it, one morning was placed
In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced
To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone
After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.
Weeks passed. When he came back again he returned
With a tall ancient dame, from whose lips the child learned
That they were of the same race and name. With a face
Sad and anxious, to this withered stock of the race
He confided the orphan, and left them alone
In the old lonely house.
In a few days 't was known,
To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watchword
And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword
For a Fatherland fathered no more (such is fate !)
By legitimate parents.
And meanwhile, elate

And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away : —
"To the life of inaction farewell! After all,
Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,
But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,
In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.
Freedom! action! . . . the desert to breathe in, — the lance
Of the Arab to follow! I go! *Vive la France!*"

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as years fled,
'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women led
Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child grew
Into girlhood; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees
In his loveliest fancies: as pure as a pearl,
And as perfect: a noble and innocent girl,
With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright!
Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . "Let Constance
Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France
I may be ere the close of the year. I confide
My life's treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,
The world which we live in."
To Paris then came
Constance to abide with that old stately dame
In that old stately Faubourg.
The young Englishman
Thus met her. 'T was there their acquaintance began,
There it closed. That old miracle — Love-at-first-sight —
Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright
Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden
Nor checked, the young soldier was graciously bidden
An habitual guest to that house by the dame.
His own candid graces, the world-honored name
Of his father (in him not dishonored) were both
Fair titles to favor. His love, nothing loath,
The old lady observed, was returned by Constance.
And as the child's uncle his absence from France
Yet prolonged, she (thus easing long self-gratulation)
Wrote to him a lengthened and moving narration
Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer:
His father's fair fame; the boy's deference to her;
His love for Constance, — unaffected, sincere;
And the girl's love for him, read by her in those clear
Limpid eyes; then the pleasure with which she awaited
Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,
Brief, stern; such as stunned and astonished the dame.

"Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day
You receive this. Until my return she may stay
At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever
To behold me again, understand, she will never
Wed that man.
"You have broken faith with me. Farewell!"

No appeal from that sentence.
It needs not to tell
The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover:
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.

Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face
Of a life, where invisible hands seemed to trace
O'er the threshold, these words . . . "Hope no more!"
Unreturned
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would have spurned
That weakness which suffers a woman to lie
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,
Beat him down, and destroyed him?
News reached him indeed,
Through a comrade, who brought him a letter to read
From the dame who had care of Constance (it was one
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which said
That Constance, although never a murmur betrayed
What she suffered, in silence grew paler each day,
And seemed visibly drooping and dying away.
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'T was told
With such broken, passionate words, as unfold
In glimpses alone, a coiled grief. Through each pause
Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,
The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,
And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-roof
At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,
The sick man, exhausted, drooped backward his head,
And fell into a feverish slumber.
Long while
Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The still smile
That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face
And make it like heaven, was fled from its place
In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there
Seemed to darken the lines of long sorrow and care,
As low to herself she sighed . . .
"Hath it, Eugène,
Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet, all in vain!
Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a man,
And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I can?
Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!
And then, — soul of mine, whither? whither?"

XVIII.

Large, slow,
Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.
"*Here*, at least, I have failed not" . . . she mused . . . "this is well!"
She drew from her bosom two letters.
In one,
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.
"The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!
The hope of a home saved by thee, — of a heart
Which hath never since then (thrice endeared as thou art!)
Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! . . . save my son!
And if not" . . . the letter went brokenly on,
"Heaven help us!"
Then followed, from Alfred, a few
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,
So unlike his own: how in beauty and truth
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave!

And how he had striven his son's youth to save
From the errors so sadly redeemed in his own,
And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,
In whose youth he had garnered his age, he had seemed
To be blessed by a pledge that the past was redeemed,
And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak
Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seemed to break
Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back again
The hopes of the future. To sue for consent
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might relent
Experience rejected . . . "My life for the boy's!"
(He exclaimed); "for I die with my son, if he dies!
Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!
Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save my son!"

XIX.

"Ay!" murmured the Sœur Seraphine . . . "heart to heart!
There, at least, I have failed not! Fulfilled is my part?
Accomplished my mission? One act crowns the whole.
Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to soul!"
She knelt down, and prayed. Still the boy slumbered on.
Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent
O'er the daily reports, in his well-ordered tent
There sits a French General, — bronzed by the sun
And seared by the sands of Algeria. One
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be
The idol, the darling, the dream, and the star
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,
And wary in council. He entered, indeed,
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)
The Army of France: and had risen, in part,
From a singular aptitude proved for the art
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;
Partly, too, from a name and position which France
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won
With many a wound, trenched in many a scar,
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to bear
Smiling token of provident order and care.
All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing bands.
In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,
The messengers come, and the messengers go,
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:
To report how the sapper contends with the soil
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring
In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,
Moving all.

He is bending his brow o'er some plan
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.
The officer standing beside him is fain
To refer to the angel solicitous cares
Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares
To be known through the camp as a seraph of grace:
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each place
Where suffering is seen, silent, active, — the Sœur . . .
Sœur . . . how do they call her?
"Ay, truly, of her
I have heard much," the General, musing, replies;
"And we owe her already (unless rumor lies)
The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean . . .
Ay, how do they call her? . . . the Sœur — Seraphine,
(Is it not so?) I rarely forget names once heard."

"Yes; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant."
"On my word,
I have much wished to see her. I fancy I trace,
In some facts traced to her, something more than the grace
Of an angel: I mean an acute human mind,
Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find
And, if possible, let her come to me. We shall,
I think, aid each other.
"*Oui, mon Général;*
I believe she has lately obtained the permission
To tend some sick man in the Second Division
Of our Ally: they say a relation.
"Ay, so?
A relation?"
"'T is said so."
"The name do you know?"
"*Non, mon Général.*"
While they spoke yet, there went
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.
"A Sister of Charity craves, in a case
Of urgent and serious importance, the grace
Of brief private speech with the General there.
Will the General speak with her?"
"Bid her declare
Her mission."
"She will not. She craves to be seen
And be heard."
"Well, her name then?"
"The Sœur Seraphine."
"Clear the tent. She may enter."

XXII.

The tent has been cleared.
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,
A sable long silvered: and pressed down his brow
On his hand, heavy veined. All his countenance, now
Unwitnessed, at once fell dejected, and dreary,
As a curtain let fall by a hand that 's grown weary,
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepressed,
Steals th' impatient quick sigh, which reveals in man's breast
A conflict concealed, an experience at strife
With itself, — the vexed heart's passing protest on life.
He turned to his papers. He heard the light tread
Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,
Said, "Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known
To the hearts of our soldiers; nor less to my own.
I have much wished to see you. I owe you some thanks:
In the name of all those you have saved to our ranks
I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?"
The nun
Paused silent. The General eyed her anon
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change
Darkened over his features. He muttered . . . "Strange! strange!
Any face should so strongly remind me of *her!*
Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?

Does it move as of old? Psha!
"Sit, Sister! I wait
Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State
The cause why you seek me?"
"The cause? ay, the cause!"
She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —
As one who, awaked unawares, would put back
The sleep that forever returns in the track
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not the less
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their stress,
Like doves to a penthouse, — a movement she made,
Less toward him than away from herself; drooped her head

And folded her hands on her bosom: long, spare,
Fatigued, mournful hands! Not a stream of stray hair
Escaped the pale bands; scarce more pale than the face
Which they bound and locked up in a rigid white case.
She fixed her eyes on him. There crept a vague awe
O'er his sense, such as ghosts cast.
"Eugène de Luvois,
The cause which recalls me again to your side
Is a promise that rests unfulfilled," she replied.
"I come to fulfil it."
He sprang from the place
Where he sat, pressed his hand, as in doubt, o'er his face;
And, cautiously feeling each step o'er the ground
That he trod on (as one who walks fearing the sound
Of his footstep may startle and scare out of sight
Some strange sleeping creature on which he would 'light
Unawares), crept towards her; one heavy hand laid
On her shoulder in silence; bent o'er her his head,
Searched her face with a long look of troubled appeal
Against doubt; staggered backward, and murmured . . . "Lucile!
Thus we meet then? . . . here! . . . thus?"
"Soul to soul, ay, Eugène,
As I pledged you my word that we should meet again.
Dead, . . ." she murmured, "long dead! all that lived in our lives, —
Thine and mine, — saving that which ev'n life's self survives,
The soul! 'T is my soul seeks thine own. What may reach
From my life to thy life (so wide each from each!)
Save the soul to the soul? To thy soul I would speak.
May I do so?"
He said (worked and white was his cheek
As he raised it), "Speak to me!"
Deep, tender, serene,
And sad was the gaze which the Sœur Seraphine
Held on him. She spoke.

XXIII.

As some minstrel may fling,
Preluding the music yet mute in each string,
A swift hand athwart the hushed heart of the whole,
Seeking which note most fitly may first move the soul;
And, leaving untroubled the deep chords below,
Move pathetic in numbers remote; — even so
The voice which was moving the heart of that man
Far away from its yet voiceless purpose began,
Far away in the pathos remote of the past;
Until, through her words, rose before him, at last,
Bright and dark in their beauty, the hopes that were gone
Unaccomplished from life.
He was mute.

XXIV.

She went on.
And still further down the dim past did she lead
Each yielding remembrance, far, far off, to feed
'Mid the pastures of youth, in the twilight of hope,
And the valleys of boyhood, the fresh-flowered slope
Of life's dawning land!
'T is the heart of a boy,
With its indistinct, passionate prescience of joy!
The unproved desire, — the unaimed aspiration, —
The deep conscious life that forestalls consummation;
With ever a flitting delight, — one arm's length
In advance of the august inward impulse.
The strength
Of the spirit which troubles the seed in the sand
With the birth of the palm-tree! Let ages expand
The glorious creature! The ages lie shut
(Safe, see!) in the seed, at time's signal to put
Forth their beauty and power, leaf by leaf, layer on layer,

Till the palm strikes the sun, and stands
broad in blue air.
So the palm in the palm-seed ! so, slowly
— so, wrought
Year by year unperceived, hope on hope,
thought by thought,
Trace the growth of the man from its
germ in the boy.
Ah, but Nature, that nurtures, may also
destroy !
Charm the wind and the sun, lest some
chance intervene !
While the leaf 's in the bud, while the
stem 's in the green,
A light bird bends the branch, a light
breeze breaks the bough,
Which, if spared by the light breeze, the
light bird, may grow
To baffle the tempest, and rock the high
nest,
And take both the bird and the breeze
to its breast.
Shall we save a whole forest in sparing
one seed ?
Save the man in the boy ? in the thought
save the deed ?
Let the whirlwind uproot the grown
tree, if it can !
Save the seed from the north-wind. So
let the grown man
Face out fate. Spare the man-seed in
youth.
He was dumb.
She went one step further.

XXV.

Lo ! manhood is come.
And love, the wild song-bird, hath flown
to the tree,
And the whirlwind comes after. Now
prove we, and see :
What shade from the leaf ? what sup-
port from the branch ?
Spreads the leaf broad and fair ? holds
the bough strong and stanch ?
There, he saw himself, — dark, as he
stood on that night,
The last when they met and they parted :
a sight
For heaven to mourn o'er, for hell to re-
joice !
An ineffable tenderness troubled her
voice ;
It grew weak, and a sigh broke it through.
Then he said
(Never looking at her, never lifting his
head,
As though, at his feet, there lay visibly
hurled
Those fragments), "It was not a love,
't was a world,
'T was a life that lay ruined, Lucile !"

XXVI.

She went on.
"So be it ! Perish Babel, arise Babylon !
From ruins like these rise the fanes that
shall last,
And to build up the future heaven shat-
ters the past."
"Ay," he moodily murmured, "and
who cares to scan
The heart's perished world, if the world
gains a man ?
From the past to the present, though
late, I appeal ;
To the nun Seraphine, from the woman
Lucile !"

XXVII.

Lucile ! . . . the old name, — the old self !
silenced long :
Heard once more ! felt once more !
As some soul to the throng
Of invisible spirits admitted, baptized
By death to a new name and nature, —
surprised
'Mid the songs of the seraphs, hears
faintly, and far,
Some voice from the earth, left below a
dim star,
Calling to her forlornly ; and (saddening
the psalms
Of the angels, and piercing the Paradise
palms !)
The name borne 'mid earthly belovéds
on earth
Sighed above some lone grave in the land
of her birth ; —
So that one word . . . Lucile ! . . . stirred
the Sœur Seraphine,
For a moment. Anon she resumed her
serene
And concentrated calm.
"Let the Nun, then, retrace
The life of the Soldier !" . . . she said,
with a face
That glowed, gladdening her words.
"To the present I come :
Leave the Past."
There her voice rose, and seemed as
when some
Pale Priestess proclaims from her temple
the praise

Of the hero whose brows she is crowning with bays.
Step by step did she follow his path from the place
Where their two paths diverged. Year by year did she trace
(Familiar with all) his, the soldier's existence.
Her words were of trial, endurance, resistance;
Of the leaguer around this besieged world of ours:
And the same sentinels that ascend the same towers
And report the same foes, the same fears, the same strife,
Waged alike to the limits of each human life.
She went on to speak of the lone moody lord,
Shut up in his lone moody halls: every word
Held the weight of a tear: she recorded the good
He had patiently wrought through a whole neighborhood;
And the blessing that lived on the lips of the poor,
By the peasant's hearthstone, or the cottager's door.
There she paused: and her accents seemed dipped in the hue
Of his own sombre heart, as the picture she drew
Of the poor, proud, sad spirit, rejecting love's wages,
Yet working love's work; reading backwards life's pages
For penance; and stubbornly, many a a time,
Both missing the moral, and marring the rhyme.
Then she spoke of the soldier! . . . the man's work and fame,
The pride of a nation, a world's just acclaim!
Life's inward approval!

XXVIII.

Her voice reached his heart,
And sank lower. She spoke of herself: how, apart
And unseen, — far away, — she had watched, year by year,
With how many a blessing, how many a tear,
And how many a prayer, every stage in the strife:
Guessed the thought in the deed: traced the love in the life:
Blessed the man in the man's work!
"*Thy* work . . . O, not mine!
Thine, Lucile!" . . . he exclaimed . . .
"all the worth of it thine
If worth there be in it!"
Her answer conveyed
His reward, and her own: joy that cannot be said
Alone by the voice . . . eyes — face — spoke silently:
All the woman, one grateful emotion!
And she
A poor Sister of Charity! hers a life spent
In one silent effort for others! . . . .
She bent
Her divine face above him, and filled up his heart
With the look that glowed from it.
Then slow, with soft art,
Fixed her aim, and moved to it.

XXIX.

He, the soldier humane,
He, the hero; whose heart hid in glory the pain
Of a youth disappointed; whose life had made known
The value of man's life! . . . that youth overthrown
And retrieved, had it left him no pity for youth
In another? his own life of strenuous truth
Accomplished in act, had it taught him no care
For the life of another? . . . O no! everywhere
In the camp which she moved through, she came face to face
With some noble token, some generous trace
Of his active humanity . . .
"Well," he replied,
"If it be so?"
"I come from the solemn bedside
Of a man that is dying," she said.
"While we speak
A life is in jeopardy."
"Quick then! you seek
Aid or medicine, or what?"
"'T is not needed," she said.
"Medicine? yes, for the mind! 'T is a heart that needs aid!

You, Eugène de Luvois, you (and you only) can
Save the life of this man. Will you save it?"
"What man?
How? . . . where? . . . can you ask?"
She went rapidly on
To her object in brief vivid words . . .
The young son
Of Matilda and Alfred — the boy lying there
Half a mile from that tent-door — the father's despair,
The mother's deep anguish — the pride of the boy
In the father — the father's one hope and one joy
In the son: — the son now — wounded, dying! She told
Of the father's stern struggle with life: the boy's bold,
Pure, and beautiful nature: the fair life before him
If that life were but spared . . . yet a word might restore him!
The boy's broken love for the niece of Eugène!
Its pathos: the girl's love for him; how, half slain
In his tent she had found him; won from him the tale;
Sought to nurse back his life; found her efforts still fail;
Beaten back by a love that was stronger than life;
Of how bravely till then he had stood in that strife
Wherein England and France in their best blood, at last,
Had bathed from remembrance the wounds of the past.
And shall nations be nobler than men? Are not great
Men the models of nations? For what is a state
But the many's confused imitation of one?
Shall he, the fair hero of France, on the son
Of his ally seek vengeance, destroying perchance
An innocent life, — here, when England and France
Have forgiven the sins of their fathers of yore,
And baptized a new hope in their sons' recent gore?
She went on to tell how the boy had clung still
To life, for the sake of life's uses, until
From his weak hands the strong effort dropped, stricken down
By the news that the heart of Constance, like his own,
Was breaking beneath . . .
But there "Hold!" he exclaimed,
Interrupting, "forbear!" . . . his whole face was inflamed
With the heart's swarthy thunder which yet, while she spoke,
Had been gathering silent, — at last the storm broke
In grief or in wrath . . .
"'T is to him, then," he cried, . . .
Checking suddenly short the tumultuous stride,
"That I owe these late greetings, — for him you are here, —
For his sake you seek me, — for him, it is clear,
You have deigned at the last to bethink you again
Of this long-forgotten existence!"
"Eugène!"
"Ha! fool that I was!" . . . he went on, . . . "and just now,
While you spoke yet, my heart was beginning to grow
Almost boyish again, almost sure of *one* friend!
Yet this was the meaning of all, — this the end!
Be it so! There 's a sort of slow justice (admit!)
In this, — that the word that man's finger hath writ
In fire on my heart, I return him at last.
Let him learn that word, — Never!"
"Ah, still to the past
Must the present be vassal?" she said.
"In the hour
We last parted I urged you to put forth the power
Which I felt to be yours, in the conquest of life.
Yours, the promise to strive: mine, — to watch o'er the strife.
I foresaw you would conquer; you *have* conquered much,
Much, indeed, that is noble! I hail it as such,
And am here to record and applaud it. I saw

Not the less in your nature, Eugène de Luvois,
One peril, — one point where I feared you would fail
To subdue that worst foe which a man can assail, —
Himself: and I promised that, if I should see
My champion once falter, or bend the brave knee,
That moment would bring me again to his side.
That moment is come! for that peril was pride,
And you falter. I plead for yourself, and one other,
For that gentle child without father or mother,
To whom you are both. I plead, soldier of France,
For your own nobler nature, — and plead for Constance!"
At the sound of that name he averted his head.
"Constance! . . . Ay, she entered my lone life" (he said)
"When its sun was long set; and hung over its night
Her own starry childhood. I have but that light,
In the midst of much darkness! Who names me but she
With titles of love? and what rests there for me
In the silence of age save the voice of that child?
The child of my own better life, undefiled!
My creature, carved out of my heart of hearts!"
"Say,"
Said the Sœur Seraphine, — "are you able to lay
Your hand as a knight on your heart as a man
And swear that, whatever may happen, you can
Feel assured for the life you thus cherish?"
"How so?"
He looked up. "If the boy should die thus?"
"Yes, I know
What your look would imply . . . this sleek stranger forsooth!
Because on his cheek was the red rose of youth
The heart of my niece must break for it!"
She cried,
"Nay, but hear me yet further!"
With slow heavy stride,
Unheeding her words, he was pacing the tent,
He was muttering low to himself as he went.
"Ay, these young things lie safe in our heart just so long
As their wings are in growing; and when these are strong
They break it, and farewell! the bird flies!" . . .
The nun
Laid her hand on the soldier, and murmured, "The sun
Is descending, life fleets while we talk thus! O, yet
Let this day upon one final victory set,
And complete a life's conquest!"
He said, "Understand!
If Constance wed the son of this man, by whose hand
My heart hath been robbed, she is lost to my life!
Can her home be my home? Can I claim in the wife
Of that man's son the child of my age? At her side
Shall he stand on my hearth? Shall I sue to the bride
Of . . . enough!
"Ah, and you immemorial halls
Of my Norman forefathers, whose shadow yet falls
On my fancy, and fuses hope, memory, past,
Present, — all, in one silence! old trees to the blast
Of the North Sea repeating the tale of old days,
Nevermore, nevermore in the wild bosky ways
Shall I hear through your umbrage ancestral the wind
Prophesy as of yore, when it shook the deep mind
Of my boyhood, with whispers from out the far years
Of love, fame, the raptures life cools down with tears!
Henceforth shall the tread of a Vargrave alone
Rouse your echoes?"
"O, think not," she said, "of the son

Of the man whom unjustly you hate; only think
Of this young human creature, that cries from the brink
Of a grave to your mercy!
"Recall your own words
(Words my memory mournfully ever records!)
How with love may be wrecked a whole life! then, Eugène,
Look with me (still those words in our ears!) once again
At this young soldier sinking from life here, — dragged down
By the weight of the love in his heart: no renown,
No fame comforts *him!* nations shout not above
The lone grave down to which he is bearing the love
Which life has rejected! Will *you* stand apart?
You, with such a love's memory deep in your heart!
You the hero, whose life hath perchance been led on
Through the deeds it hath wrought to the fame it hath won,
By recalling the visions and dreams of a youth,
Such as lies at your door now: who have but, in truth,
To stretch forth a hand, to speak only one word,
And by that word you rescue a life!"
He was stirred.
Still he sought to put from him the cup; bowed his face
On his hand; and anon, as though wishing to chase
With one angry gesture his own thoughts aside,
He sprang up, brushed past her, and bitterly cried,
"No! — Constance wed a Vargrave! — I cannot consent!"
Then uprose the Sœur Seraphine.
The low tent,
In her sudden uprising, seemed dwarfed by the height
From which those imperial eyes poured the light
Of their deep silent sadness upon him.
No wonder
He felt, as it were, his own stature shrink under
The compulsion of that grave regard!
For between
The Duc de Luvois and the Sœur Seraphine
At that moment there rose all the height of one soul
O'er another; she looked down on him from the whole
Lonely length of a life. There were sad nights and days,
There were long months and years in that heart-searching gaze;
And her voice, when she spoke, with sharp pathos thrilled through
And transfixed him.
"Eugène de Luvois, but for you,
I might have been now, — not this wandering nun,
But a mother, a wife, — pleading, not for the son
Of another, but blessing some child of my own,
His, — the man's that I once loved!...
Hush! that which is done
I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That's best
Which God sends. 'T was His will: it is mine. And the rest
Of that riddle I will not look back to. He reads
In your heart, — He that judges of all thoughts and deeds,
With eyes, mine forestall not! This only I say:
You have not the right (read it, you, as you may!)
To say... 'I am the wronged.'"...
"Have I wronged thee? — wronged *thee!*"
He faltered, "Lucile, ah, Lucile!"
"Nay, not me,"
She murmured, "but man! The lone nun standing here
Has no claim upon earth, and is passed from the sphere
Of earth's wrongs and earth's reparations. But she,
The dead woman, Lucile, she whose grave is in me,
Demands from her grave reparation to man,
Reparation to God. Heed, O heed, while you can,
This voice from the grave!"
"Hush!" he moaned, "I obey
The Sœur Seraphine. There, Lucile! let this pay

Every debt that is due to that grave.
Now lead on :
I follow you, Sœur Seraphine ! . . . To the son
Of Lord Alfred Vargrave . . . and then," . . .
As he spoke
He lifted the tent-door, and down the dun smoke
Pointed out the dark bastions, with batteries crowned,
Of the city beneath them . . .
"Then, *there*, underground,
And *valete et plaudite*, soon as may be !
Let the old tree go down to the earth, — the old tree,
With the worm at its heart ! Lay the axe to the root !
Who will miss the old stump, so we save the young shoot ?
A Vargrave ! . . . this pays all . . . Lead on ! . . . In the seed
Save the forest ! . . .
"I follow . . . forth, forth ! where you lead."

XXX.

The day was declining ; a day sick and damp.
In a blank ghostly glare shone the bleak ghostly camp
Of the English. Alone in his dim, spectral tent
(Himself the wan spectre of youth), with eyes bent
On the daylight departing, the sick man was sitting
Upon his low pallet. These thoughts, vaguely flitting,
Crossed the silence between him and death, which seemed near.
— "Pain o'erreaches itself, so is balked ! else, how bear
This intense and intolerable solitude,
With its eye on my heart and its hand on my blood ?
Pulse by pulse ! Day goes down : yet she comes not again.
Other suffering, doubtless, where hope is more plain,
Claims her elsewhere. I die, strange ! and scarcely feel sad.
O, to think of Constance *thus*, and not to go mad !
But Death, it would seem, dulls the sense to his own
Dull doings . . . "

XXXI.

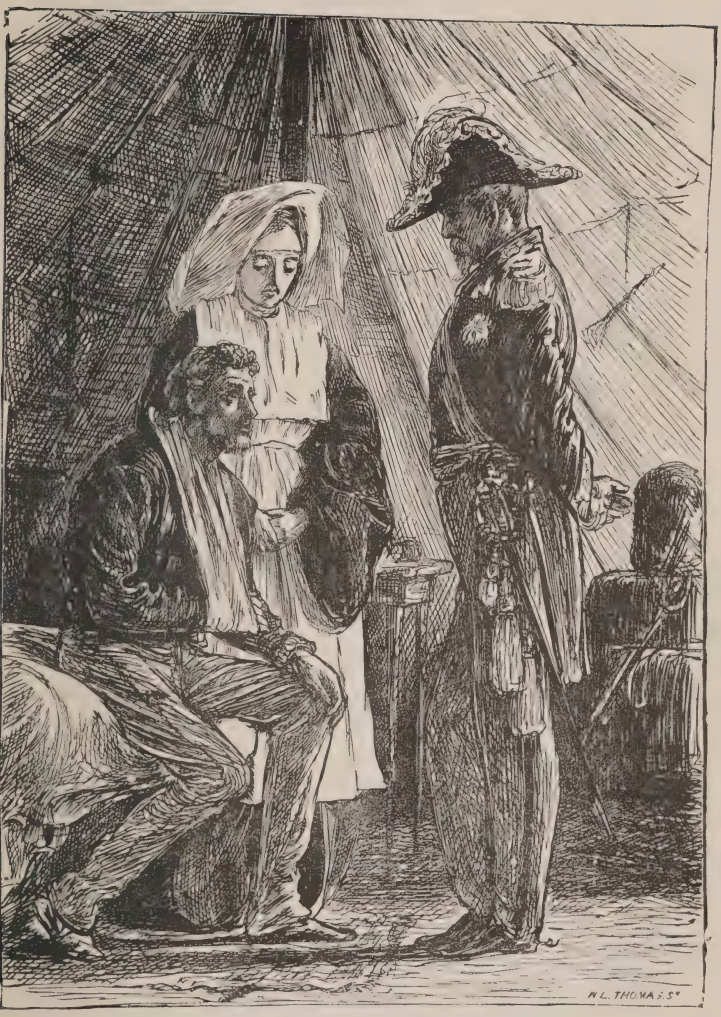
Between those sick eyes and the sun
A shadow fell thwart.

XXXII.

'T is the pale nun once more !
But who stands at her side, mute and dark in the door ?
How oft had he watched through the glory and gloom
Of the battle, with long, longing looks that dim plume
Which now (one stray sunbeam upon it) shook, stooped
To where the tent-curtain, dividing, was looped !
How that stern face had haunted and hovered about
The dreams it still scared ! through what fond fear and doubt
Had the boy yearned in heart to the hero ! (What 's like
A boy's love for some famous man ?) . . . O, to strike
A wild path through the battle, down striking perchance
Some rash foeman too near the great soldier of France,
And so fall in his glorious regard ! . . . Oft, how oft
Had his heart flashed this hope out, whilst watching aloft
The dim battle that plume dance and dart, — never seen
So near till this moment ! how eager to glean
Every stray word, dropped through the camp-babble in praise
Of his hero, — each tale of old venturous days
In the desert ! And now . . . could he speak out his heart
Face to face with that man ere he died !

XXXIII.

With a start
The sick soldier sprang up : the blood sprang up in him,
To his throat, and o'erthrew him : he reeled back : a dim
Sanguine haze filled his eyes ; in his ears rose the din
And rush, as of cataracts loosened within,
Through which he saw faintly, and heard, the pale nun
(Looking larger than life, where she stood in the sun)



"The sick soldier sprang up." See page 144

Point to him and murmur, "Behold!"
Then that plume
Seemed to wave like a fire, and fade off in the gloom
Which momently put out the world.

XXXIV.

To his side
Moved the man the boy dreaded yet loved . . . "Ah!" . . . he sighed,
"The smooth brow, the fair Vargrave face! and those eyes,
All the mother's! The old things again!
"Do not rise.
You suffer, young man?"

THE BOY.

Sir, I die.

THE DUKE.

Not so young!

THE BOY.

So young? yes! and yet I have tangled among
The frayed warp and woof of this brief life of mine
Other lives than my own. Could my death but untwine
The vext skein . . . but it will not. Yes, Duke, young — so young!
And I knew you not? yet I have done you a wrong
Irreparable! . . . late, too late to repair.
If I knew any means . . . but I know none! . . . I swear,
If this broken fraction of time could extend
Into infinite lives of atonement, no end
Would seem too remote for my grief (could that be!)
To include it! Not too late, however, for me
To entreat: is it too late for you to forgive?

THE DUKE.

You wrong — my forgiveness — explain.

THE BOY.

Could I live!
Such a very few hours left to life, yet I shrink,
I falter! . . . Yes, Duke, your forgiveness I think
Should free my soul hence.

Ah! you could not surmise
That a boy's beating heart, burning thoughts, longing eyes
Were following you evermore (heeded not!)
While the battle was flowing between us: nor what
Eager, dubious footsteps at nightfall oft went
With the wind and the rain, round and round your blind tent,
Persistent and wild as the wind and the rain,
Unnoticed as these, weak as these, and as vain!
O, how obdurate then looked your tent! The waste air
Grew stern at the gleam which said . . . "Off! he is there!"
I know not what merciful mystery now
Brings you here, whence the man whom you see lying low
Other footsteps (not those!) must soon bear to the grave.
But death is at hand, and the few words I have
Yet to speak, I must speak them at once. Duke, I swear,
As I lie here, (Death's angel too close not to hear!)
That I meant not this wrong to you. Duc de Luvois,
I loved your niece — loved? why, I *love* her! I saw,
And, seeing, how could I but love her? I seemed
Born to love her. Alas, were that all! had I dreamed
Of this love's cruel consequence as it rests now
Ever fearfully present before me, I vow
That the secret, unknown, had gone down to the tomb
Into which I descend . . . O why, whilst there was room
In life left for warning, had no one the heart
To warn me? Had any one whispered . . . "Depart!"
To the hope the whole world seemed in league then to nurse!
Had any one hinted . . . "Beware of the curse
Which is coming!" There was not a voice raised to tell,
Not a hand moved to warn from the blow ere it fell,

And then . . . then the blow fell on *both!*
This is why
I implore you to pardon that great injury
Wrought on her, and, through her,
wrought on you, Heaven knows
How unwittingly!

THE DUKE.

Ah! . . . and, young soldier, suppose
That I came here to seek, not grant,
pardon?—

THE BOY.

Of whom?

THE DUKE.

Of yourself.

THE BOY.

Duke, I bear in my heart to the tomb
No boyish resentment; not one lonely
thought
That honors you not. In all this there
is nought
'T is for me to forgive.
Every glorious act
Of your great life starts forward, an eloquent fact,
To confirm in my boy's heart its faith in
your own.
And have I not hoarded, to ponder
upon,
A hundred great acts from your life?
Nay, all these,
Were they so many lying and false witnesses,
Does there rest not *one* voice, which was
never untrue?
I believe in Constance, Duke, as she
does in you!
In this great world around us, wherever
we turn,
Some grief irremediable we discern;
And yet — there sits God, calm in
Heaven above!
Do we trust one whit less in His justice
or love?
I judge not.

THE DUKE.

Enough! hear at last, then, the truth.
Your father and I, — foes we were in
our youth.
It matters not why. Yet thus much
understand:
The hope of my youth was signed out by
his hand.
I was not of those whom the buffets of
fate
Tame and teach: and my heart buried
slain love in hate.
If your own frank young heart, yet unconscious of all
Which turns the heart's blood in its
springtide to gall,
And unable to guess even aught that
the furrow
Across these gray brows hides of sin or
of sorrow,
Comprehends not the evil and grief of
my life,
'T will at least comprehend how intense
was the strife
Which is closed in this act of atonement, whereby
I seek in the son of my youth's enemy
The friend of my age. Let the present
release
Here acquitted the past! In the name
of my niece,
Whom for my life in yours as a hostage
I give,
Are you great enough, boy, to forgive
me, — and live?

Whilst he spoke thus, a doubtful tumultuous joy
Chased its fleeting effects o'er the face
of the boy:
As when some stormy moon, in a long
cloud confined,
Struggles outward through shadows, the
varying wind
Alternates, and bursts, self-surprised,
from her prison,
So that slow joy grew clear in his face.
He had risen
To answer the Duke; but strength failed
every limb;
A strange, happy feebleness trembled
through him.
With a faint cry of rapturous wonder,
he sank
On the breast of the nun, who stood
near.
"Yes, boy! thank
This guardian angel," the Duke said.
"I — you,
We owe all to her. Crown her work.
Live! be true
To your young life's fair promise, and
live for her sake!"
"Yes, Duke: I will live. I *must* live,
— live to make

My whole life the answer you claim," the boy said,
"For joy does not kill!"
Back again the faint head
Declined on the nun's gentle bosom. She saw
His lips quiver, and motioned the Duke to withdraw
And leave them a moment together. He eyed
Them both with a wistful regard; turned, and sighed,
And lifted the tent-door, and passed from the tent.

XXXV.

Like a furnace, the fervid, intense occident
From its hot seething levels a great glare struck up
On the sick metal sky. And, as out of a cup
Some witch watches boiling wild portents arise,
Monstrous clouds, massed, misshapen, and tinged with strange dyes,
Hovered over the red fume, and changed to weird shapes
As of snakes, salamanders, efts, lizards, storks, apes,
Chimeras, and hydras: whilst — ever the same —
In the midst of all these (creatures fused by his flame,
And changed by his influence!) changeless, as when,
Ere he lit down to death generations of men,
O'er that crude and ungainly creation, which there
With wild shapes this cloud-world seemed to mimic in air,
The eye of Heaven's all-judging witness, he shone,
And shall shine on the ages we reach not, — the sun!

XXXVI.

Nature posted her parable thus in the skies,
And the man's heart bore witness. Life's vapors arise
And fall, pass and change, group themselves and revolve
Round the great central life, which is Love: these dissolve
And resume themselves, here assume beauty, there terror;
And the phantasmagoria of infinite error,
And endless complexity, lasts but a while;
Life's self, the immortal, immutable smile
Of God, on the soul, in the deep heart of Heaven
Lives changeless, unchanged: and our morning and even
Are earth's alternations, not Heaven's.

XXXVII.

While he yet
Watched the skies, with this thought in his heart; while he set
Thus unconsciously all his life forth in his mind,
Summed it up, searched it out, proved it vapor and wind,
And embraced the new life which that hour had revealed, —
Love's life, which earth's life had defaced and concealed;
Lucile left the tent and stood by him. Her tread
Aroused him; and, turning towards her, he said:
"O Sœur Seraphine, are you happy?"
"Eugène,
What is happier than to have hoped not in vain?"
She answered, — "And you?"
"Yes."
"You do not repent?"
"No."
"Thank Heaven!" she murmured. He musingly bent
His looks on the sunset, and somewhat apart
Where he stood, sighed, as though to his innermost heart,
"O blessed are they, amongst whom was not,
Whose morning unclouded, without stain or spot,
Predicts a pure evening; who, sunlike, in light
Have traversed, unsullied, the world, and set bright!"

But she in response, "Mark yon ship far away,
Asleep on the wave, in the last light of day,

With all its hushed thunders shut up! Would you know
A thought which came to me a few days ago,
Whilst watching those ships? . . . When the great Ship of Life,
Surviving, though shattered, the tumult and strife
Of earth's angry element,—masts broken short,
Decks drenched, bulwarks beaten,—drives safe into port,
When the Pilot of Galilee, seen on the strand,
Stretches over the waters a welcoming hand;
When, heeding no longer the sea's baffled roar,
The mariner turns to his rest evermore;
What will then be the answer the helmsman must give?
Will it be . . . 'Lo our log-book! Thus once did we live
In the zones of the South; thus we traversed the seas
Of the Orient; there dwelt with the Hesperides;
Thence followed the west-wind; here, eastward we turned;
The stars failed us there; just here land we discerned
On our lee; there the storm overtook us at last;
That day went the bowsprit, the next day the mast;
There the mermen came round us, and there we saw bask
A siren'? The Captain of Port will he ask
Any one of such questions? I cannot think so!
But . . . 'What is the last Bill of Health you can show?'
Not — How fared the soul through the trials she passed?
But — What is the state of that soul at the last?"

"May it be so!" he sighed. "There! the sun drops, behold!"
And indeed, whilst he spoke, all the purple and gold
In the west had turned ashen, save one fading strip
Of light that yet gleamed from the dark nether lip
Of a long reef of cloud; and o'er sullen ravines
And ridges the raw damps were hanging white screens
Of melancholy mist.
"*Nunc dimittis!*" she said.
"O God of the living! whilst yet 'mid the dead
And the dying we stand here alive, and thy days
Returning, admit space for prayer and for praise,
In both these confirm us!
"The helmsman, Eugène,
Needs the compass to steer by. Pray always. Again
We two part: each to work out Heaven's will: you, I trust,
In the world's ample witness; and I, as I must,
In secret and silence: you, love, fame, await;
Me, sorrow and sickness. We meet at one gate
When all's over. The ways they are many and wide,
And seldom are two ways the same. Side by side
May we stand at the same little door when all's done!
The ways they are many, the end it is one.
He that knocketh shall enter: who asks shall obtain:
And who seeketh, he findeth. Remember, Eugène!"
She turned to depart.
"Whither? whither?" . . . he said.
She stretched forth her hand where, already outspread
On the darkened horizon, remotely they saw
The French camp-fires kindling.
"O Duc de Luvois,
See yonder vast host, with its manifold heart
Made as one man's by one hope! That hope 't is your part
To aid towards achievement, to save from reverse:
Mine, through suffering to soothe, and through sickness to nurse.
I go to my work: you to yours."

XXXVII.

Whilst she spoke
On the wide wasting evening there distantly broke

The low roll of musketry. Straightway, anon,
From the dim Flag-staff Battery bellowed a gun.
"Our chasseurs are at it!" he muttered. She turned,
Smiled, and passed up the twilight. He faintly discerned
Her form, now and then, on the flat lurid sky
Rise, and sink, and recede through the mists; by and by
The vapors closed round, and he saw her no more.

XXXIX.

Nor shall we. For her mission, accomplished, is o'er.
The mission of genius on earth! To uplift,
Purify, and confirm by its own gracious gift,
The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor
To degrade, and drag down, and oppose it forever.
The mission of genius: to watch, and to wait,
To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate.
The mission of woman on earth! to give birth
To the mercy of Heaven descending on earth.
The mission of woman: permitted to bruise
The head of the serpent, and sweetly infuse,
Through the sorrow and sin of earth's registered curse,
The blessing which mitigates all: born to nurse,
And to soothe, and to solace, to help and to heal
The sick world that leans on her. This was Lucile.

XL.

A power hid in pathos: a fire veiled in cloud:
Yet still burning outward: a branch which, though bowed
By the bird in its passage, springs upward again:
Through all symbols I search for her sweetness — in vain!
Judge her love by her life. For our life is but love
In act. Pure was hers: and the dear God above,
Who knows what His creatures have need of for life,
And whose love includes all loves, through much patient strife
Led her soul into peace. Love, though love may be given
In vain, is yet lovely. Her own native heaven
More clearly she mirrored, as life's troubled dream
Wore away; and love sighed into rest, like a stream
That breaks its heart over wild rocks toward the shore
Of the great sea which hushes it up evermore
With its little wild wailing. No stream from its source
Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
But what some land is gladdened. No star ever rose
And set, without influence somewhere. Who knows
What earth needs from earth's lowest creature? No life
Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife
And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.
The spirits of just men made perfect on high,
The army of martyrs who stand by the Throne
And gaze into the Face that makes glorious their own,
Know this, surely, at last. Honest love, honest sorrow,
Honest work for the day, honest hope for the morrow,
Are these worth nothing more than the hand they make weary,
The heart they have saddened, the life they leave dreary?
Hush! the sevenfold heavens to the voice of the Spirit
Echo: He that o'ercometh shall all things inherit.

XLI.

The moon was, in fire, carried up through the fog;
The loud fortress barked at her like a chained dog.

The horizon pulsed flame, the air sound.
All without,
War and winter, and twilight, and terror, and doubt;
All within, light, warmth, calm!
In the twilight, long while
Eugène de Luvois with a deep, thoughtful smile
Lingered, looking, and listening, lone by the tent.
At last he withdrew, and night cosed as he went.

THE APPLE OF LIFE.

From the river Euphrates, the river whose source is in Paradise, far
As red Egypt, — sole lord of the land and the sea, 'twixt the home of the star
That is born in the blush of the East, and the porch of the chambers of rest
Where the great sea is girded with fire, and Orion returns in the West,
And the ships come and go in grand silence, — King Solomon reigned. And behold,
In that time there was everywhere silver as common as stones be, and gold
That for plenty was 'counted as silver, and cedar as sycamore-trees
That are found in the vale, for abundance. For God to the King gave all these,
With glory exceeding; moreover all kings of the earth to him came,
Because of his wisdom, to hear him. So great was King Solomon's fame.

And for all this the King's soul was sad. And his heart said within him, "Alas!
For man dies! if his glory abideth, himself from his glory shall pass.
And that which remaineth behind him, he seeth it not any more:
For how shall he know what comes after, who knoweth not what went before?
I have planted me gardens and vineyards, and gotten me silver and gold,
And my hand from whatever my heart hath desired I did not withhold:
And what profit have I in the works of my hands which I take not away?
I have searchéd out wisdom and knowledge: and what do they profit me, they?
As the fool dieth, so doth the wise. What is gathered is scattered again.
As the breath of the beasts, even so is the breath of the children of men:
And the same thing befalleth them both. And not any man's soul is his own."

This he thought, as he sat in his garden and watched the great sun going down
In the glory thereof; and the earth and the sky by the beam of the same
Were clothed with the gladness of color, and bathed in the beauty of flame.
And "Behold," said the King, "in a moment the glory shall vanish!" Even then,
While he spake, he was 'ware of a man drawing near him, who seemed to his ken
(By the hair in its blackness like flax that is burned in the hemp-dresser's shed,
And the brow's smoky hue, and the smouldering eyeball more livid than lead)
As the sons of the land that lies under the sword of the Cherub whose wing
Wraps in wrath the shut gateways of Paradise. He, being come to the King,
Seven times made obeisance before him. To whom, "What art thou," the King cried,
"That thus unannounced to King Solomon comest?" The man, spreading wide
The palm of his right hand, showed in it an apple yet bright from the Tree
In whose stem springs the life never-failing which Sin lost to Adam, when he,
Tasting knowledge forbidden, found death in the fruit of it. . . . So doth the Giver
Evil gifts to the evil apportion. And "Hail! let the King live forever!"
Bowing down at the feet of the monarch, and laughingly, even as one
Whose meaning, in joy or in jest, hovers hid 'twixt the word and the tone,

Said the stranger, "For lo ye" (and lightly he dropped in the hand of the King
That apple), "from 'twixt the four rivers of Eden, GOD gave me to bring
To his servant King Solomon, even to my lord that on Israel's throne
He hath 'stablisht, this fruit from the Tree in whose branch Life abideth : for none
Shall taste death, having tasted this apple."
And therewith he vanished.

Remained
In the hand of the King the life-apple : ambrosial of breath, golden-grained,
Rosy-bright as a star dipt in sunset. The King turned it o'er, and perused
The fruit, which, alluring his lip, in his hand lay untasted.
He mused,
"Life is good : but not life in itself. Life eternal, eternally young,
That were life to be lived, or desired ! Well it were if a man could prolong
The manhood that moves in the muscles, the rapture that mounts in the brain
When life at the prime, in the pastime of living, led on by the train
Of the jubilant senses, exulting goes forth, brave of body and spirit,
To conquer, choose, claim, and enjoy what 't was born to achieve or inherit.
The dance, and the festal procession ! the pride in the strenuous play
Of the sinews that, pliant of power, the will, though it wanton, obey !
When the veins are yet wishful, and in them the bountiful impulses beat,
When the lilies of Love are yet living, the roses of Beauty yet sweet :
And the eye glows with glances that kindle, the lip breathes the warmth that inspires,
And the hand hath yet vigor to seize the good thing which the spirit desires !
O well for the foot that bounds forward ! and ever the wind it awakes
Lifts no lock from the forehead yet white, not a leaf that is withered yet shakes
From the loose crown that laughs on young tresses ! and ever the earth and the skies
Are crammed with audacious contingencies, measureless means of surprise !
Life is sweet to the young that yet know not what life is. But life, after Youth,
The gay liar, leaves hold of the bauble, and Age, with his terrible truth,
Picks it up, and perceives it is broken, and knows it unfit to engage
The care it yet craves. . . . Life eternal, eternally wedded to Age !
What gain were in that ? Why should any man seek what he loathes to prolong ?
The twilight that darkens the eyeball : the dull ear that 's deaf to the song,
When the maidens rejoice and the bride to the bridegroom, with music, is led :
The palsy that shakes 'neath the blossoms that fall from the chill bridal bed.
When the hand saith '*I did*,' not '*I will do*,' the heart saith '*It was*,' not
''*T will be*,'
Too late in man's life is Forever, — too late comes this apple to me ! "
Then the King rose. And lo, it was evening. And leaning, because he was old,
On the sceptre that, curiously sculptured in ivory garnished with gold,
To others a rod of dominion, to him was a staff for support,
Slow paced he the murmurous pathways where myrtles, in court up to court,
Mixt with roses in garden on garden, were ranged around fountains that fed
With cool music green odorous twilights : and so, never lifting his head
To look up from the way he walked wearily, he to the House of his Pride
Reascended, and entered.

In cluster, high lamps, spices, odors, each side,
Burning inward and onward, from cinnamon ceilings, down distances vast
Of voluptuous vistas, illumined deep halls through whose silentness passed
King Solomon sighing ; where columns colossal stood, gathered in groves
As the trees of the forest in Libanus, — there where the wind, as it moves,
Whispers, "I, too, am Solomon's servant ! " — huge trunks hid in garlands of gold,
On whose tops the skilled sculptors of Sidon had granted men's gaze to behold
How the phœnix that sits on the cedar's lone summit 'mid fragrance and fire,
Ever dying, and living, hath loaded with splendors her funeral pyre ;

How the stork builds her nest on the pine-top ; the date from the palm-branch depends ;
And the aloe's great blossom bursts, crowning with beauty the life that it ends.
And from hall on to hall, in the doors, mute, magnificent slaves, watchful-eyed,
Bowed to earth as King Solomon passed them. And, passing, King Solomon sighed.
And, from hall on to hall pacing feebly, the king mused . . . "O fair Shulamite !
Thy beauty is brighter than starlight on Hebron when Hebron is bright,
Thy sweetness is sweeter than Carmel. The King rules the nations ; but thou,
Thou rulest the King, my Belovéd."

So murmured King Solomon low
To himself, as he passed through the portal of porphyry, that dripped, as he passed,
From the myrrh-sprinkled wreaths on the locks and the lintels ; and entered at last,
Still sighing, the sweet cedarn chamber, contrived for repose and delight,
Where the beautiful Shulamite slumbered. And straightway, to left and to right,
Bowing down as he entered, the Spirits in bondage to Solomon, there
Keeping watch o'er his love, sank their swords, spread their wings, and evanished in air.
The King with a kiss woke the sleeper. And, showing the fruit in his hand,
"Behold ! this was brought me erewhile by one coming," he said, "from the land
That lies under the sword of the Cherub. 'T was pluckt by strange hands from the Tree
Of whose fruit whoso tastes lives forever. And therefore I bring it to thee,
My Belovéd. For thou of the daughters of women art fairest. And lo,
I, the King, I that love thee, whom men of man's sons have called wisest, I know
That in knowledge is sorrow. Much thought is much care. In the beauty of youth,
Not the wisdom of age, is enjoyment. Nor spring, is it sweeter, in truth,
Than winter to roses once withered. The garment, though broidered with gold,
Fades apace where the moth frets the fibres. So I, in my glory, grow old.
And this life maketh mine (save the bliss of my soul in the beauty of thee)
No sweetness so great now that greatly unsweet 't were to lose what to me
Life prolonged, at its utmost, can promise. But thine, O thou spirit of bliss,
Thine is all that the living desire, — youth, beauty, love, joy in all this !
And O were it not well for the praise of the world to maintain evermore
This mould of a woman, God's masterwork, made for mankind to adore ?
Wherefore keep thou the gift I resign. Live forever, rejoicing in life !
And of women unborn yet the fairest shall still be King Solomon's wife."
So he said, and so dropped in her bosom the apple.

But when he was gone,
And the beautiful Shulamite, eying the gift of the King, sat alone
With the thoughts the King's words had awakened, as ever she turned and perused
The fruit that, alluring her lip, in her hand lay untasted — she mused,
"Life is good ; but not life in itself. So is youth, so is beauty. Mere stuff
Are all these for Love's usance. To live, it is well ; but it is not enough.
Well, too, to be fair, to be young ; but what good is in beauty and youth
If the lovely and young are not surer than they that be neither, forsooth,
Young nor lovely, of being beloved ? O my love, if thou lovest not me,
Shall I love my own life ? Am I fair, if not fair, Azariah, to thee."
Then she hid in her bosom the apple. And rose.

And, reversing the ring
That, inscribed with the word that works wonders, and signed with the seal of the King,
Compels even spirits to obedience — (for she, for a plaything, erewhile
From King Solomon's awful forefinger, had won it away with a smile) —

The beautiful Shulamite folded her veil o'er her forehead and eyes,
And unseen from the sweet cedarn chamber, unseen through the long galleries,
Unseen from the palace, she passed, and passed down to the city unseen,
Unseen passed the green garden wicket, the vineyard, the cypresses green,
And stood by the doors of the house of the Prince Azariah. And cried,
In the darkness she cried, — "Azariah, awaken ! ope, ope to me wide !
Ope the door, ope the lattice ! Arise ! Let me in, O my love ! It is I.
I, the bride of King Solomon, love thee. Love, tarry not. Love, shall I die
At thy doors ? I am sick of desire. For my love is more comely than gold.
More precious to me is my love than the throne of a king that is old.
Behold, I have passed through the city, unseen of the watchmen. I stand
By the doors of the house of my love, till my love lead me in by the hand."
Azariah arose. And unbolted the door to the fair Shulamite.
"O my queen, what dear folly is this, that hath led thee alone, and by night,
To the house of King Solomon's servant ? For lo you, the watchmen awake.
And much for my own, O my queen, must I fear, and much more for thy sake.
For at that which is done in the chamber the leek on the house-top shall peep :
And the hand of a king it is heavy : the eyes of a king never sleep :
But the bird of the air beareth news to the king, and the stars of the sky
Are as soldiers by night on the turrets. I fear, O my queen, lest we die."
"Fear thou not, O my love ! Azariah, fear nothing. For lo, what I bring !
'T is the fruit of the Tree that in Paradise GOD hideth under the wing
Of the Cherub that chased away Adam. And whoso this apple doth eat
Shall live — live forever ! And since unto me my own life is less sweet
Than thy love, Azariah, (sweet only my life is if thou lovest me !)
Therefore eat ! Live, and love, for life's sake, still, the love that gives life unto thee ! "
Then she held to his lips the life-apple, and kissed him.

But soon as alone,
Azariah leaned out from his lattice, he muttered, "'T is well ! She is gone."
While the fruit in his hand lay untasted. "Such visits," he mused, "may cost dear.
In the love of the great is great danger, much trouble, and care more than cheer."
Then he laughed and stretched forth his strong arms. For he heard from the streets of the city
The song of the women that sing in the doors after dark their love ditty.
And the clink of the wine-cup, the voice of the wanton, the tripping of feet,
And the laughter of youths running after, allured him. And "*Life, it is sweet*
While it lasts," sang the women, "*and sweeter the good minute, in that it goes.*
For who, if the rose bloomed forever, so greatly would care for the rose ?
Wherefore haste ! pluck the time in the blossom." The prince mused, "The counsel is well."
And the fruit to his lips he uplifted : yet paused. "Who is he that can tell
What his days shall bring forth ? Life forever . . . But what sort of life ? Ah, the doubt ! "
'Neath his cloak then he thrust back the apple. And opened the door and passed out
To the house of the harlot Egyptian. And mused, as he went, "Life is good :
But not life in itself. It is well while the wine-cup is hot in the blood,
And a man goeth whither he listeth, and doeth the thing that he will,
And liveth his life as he lusteth, and taketh in freedom his fill
Of the pleasure that pleaseth his humor, and feareth no snare by the way.
Shall I care to be loved by a queen, if my pride with my freedom I pay ?
Better far is a handful in quiet than both hands, though filled to o'erflow
With pride, in vexation of spirit. And sweeter the roses that blow
From the wild seeds the wind, where he wanders, with heedless beneficence flings,
Than those that are guarded by dragons to brighten the gardens of kings.

Let a man take his chance, and be happy. The hart by the hunter pursued,
That far from the herd on the hill-top bounds swift through the blue solitude,
Is more to be envied, though Death with his dart follow fast to destroy,
Than the tame beast that, pent in the paddock, tastes neither the danger nor joy
Of the mountain, and all its surprises. The main thing is, not to live *long*,
But to *live*. Better moments of rapture soon ended than ages of wrong.
Life's feast is best spiced by the flavor of death in it. Just the one chance
To lose it to-morrow the life that a man lives to-day doth enhance.
The may-be for me, not the must-be! Best flourish while flourish the flowers,
And fall ere the frost falls. The dead, do they rest or arise with new powers?
Either way, well for them. Mine, meanwhile, be the cup of life's fulness to-night.
And to-morrow . . . Well, time to consider" (he felt at the fruit). "What delight
Of his birthright had Esau, when hungry? To-day with its pottage is sweet.
For a man cannot feed and be full on the faith of to-morrow's baked meat.
Open! open, my dark-eyed beguiler of darkness!"

Up rose to his knock,
Light of foot, the lascivious Egyptian, and lifted the latch from the lock,
And opened. And led in the prince to her chamber, and shook out her hair,
Dark, heavy, and humid with odors; her bosom beneath it laid bare,
And sleek sallow shoulder; and sloped back her face, as, when falls the slant South
In wet whispers of rain, flowers bend back to catch it; so she, with shut mouth
Half-unfolding for kisses; and sank, as they fell, 'twixt his knees, with a laugh,
On the floor, in a flood of deep hair flung behind her full throat; held him half
Aloof with one large, languid arm, while the other upropped, where she lay,
Limbs flowing in fulness and lucid in surface as waters at play,
Though in firmness as slippery marble. Anon she sprang loose from his clasp,
And whirled from the table a flagon of silver twined round by an asp
That glittered, — rough gold and red rubies; and poured him, and praised him, the wine
Wherewith she first brightened the moist lip that murmured, "Ha, fool! art thou mine?
I am thine. This will last for an hour." Then, humming strange words of a song,
Sung by maidens in Memphis the old, when they bore the Crowned Image along,
Apples yellow and red from a basket with vine-leaves o'erlaid she 'gan take,
And played with, peeled, tost them, and caught them, and bit them, for idleness' sake;
But the rinds on the floor she flung from her, and laughed at the figures they made,
As her foot pusht them this way and that way together. And "Look, fool," she said,
"It is all sour fruit, this! But those I fling from me, — see here by the stain! —
Shall carry the mark of my teeth in their flesh. Could they feel but the pain,
O my soul, how these teeth should go through them! Fool, fool, what good gift dost thou bring?
For thee have I sweetened with cassia my chambers." "A gift for a king,"
Azariah laughed loud; and tost to her the apple. "This comes from the Tree
Of whose fruit whoso tastes lives forever. I care not. I give it to thee.
Nay, witch! 'tis worth more than the shekels of gold thou hast charmed from my purse.
Take it. Eat, and thank me for the meal, witch! for Eve, thy sly mother, fared worse,
O thou white-toothéd taster of apples?" "Thou liest, fool!" "Taste, then, and try.
For the truth of the fruit 's in the eating. 'T is thou art the serpent, not I."
And the strong man laughed loud as he pushed at her lip the life-apple. She caught
And held it away from her, musing; and muttered . . . "Go to! It is naught.
Fool, why dost thou laugh?" And he answered, "Because, witch, it tickles my brain
Intensely to think that all we, that be Something while yet we remain,

We, the princes of people, — ay, even the King's self, — shall die in our day,
And thou, that art Nothing, shalt sit on our graves, with our grandsons, and play."
So he said, and laughed louder.

But when, in the gray of the dawn, he was gone,
And the wan light waxed large in the window, as she on her bed sat alone,
With the fruit that, alluring her lip, in her hand lay untasted, perusing,
Perplext, the gay gift of the Prince, the dark woman thereat fell a musing,
And she thought . . . "What is Life without Honor? And what can the life that I live
Give to me, I shall care to continue, not caring for aught it can give?
I, despising the fools that despise me, — a plaything not pleasing myself, —
Whose life, for the pelf that maintains it, must sell what is paid not by pelf!
I? . . . the man called me Nothing. He said well. 'The great in their glory must go.'
And why should I linger, whose life leadeth nowhere? — a life which I know
To name is to shame — struck, unsexed, by the world from its list of the lives
Of the women whose womanhood, saved, gets them leave to be mothers and wives.
And the fancies of men change. And bitterly bought is the bread that I eat;
For, though purchased with body and spirit, when purchased 't is yet all unsweet."
Her tears fell: they fell on the apple. She sighed . . . "Sour fruit, like the rest!
Let it go with the salt tears upon it. Yet life . . . it were sweet if possessed
In the power thereof, and the beauty. 'A gift for a king' . . . did he say?
Ay, a king's life is a life as it should be, — a life like the light of the day,
Wherein all that liveth rejoiceth. For is not the King as the sun
That shineth in heaven and seemeth both heaven and itself all in one?
Then to whom may this fruit, the life-giver, be worthily given? Not me.
Nor the fool Azariah that sold it for folly. The King! only he, —
Only he hath the life that 's worth living forever. Whose life, not alone
Is the life of the King, but the life of the many made mighty in one.
To the King will I carry this apple. And he (for the hand of a king
Is a fountain of hope) in his handmaid shall honor the gift that I bring.
And men for this deed shall esteem me, with Rahab by Israel praised,
As first among those who, though lowly, their shame into honor have raised:
Such honor as lasts when life goes, and, while life lasts, shall lift it above
What, if loved by the many I loathe, must be loathed by the few I could love."

So she rose, and went forth through the city. And with her the apple she bore
In her bosom: and stood 'mid the multitude, waiting therewith in the door
Of the hall where the King, to give judgment, ascended at morning his throne:
And, kneeling there, cried, "Let the King live forever! Behold, I am one
Whom the vile of themselves count the vilest. But great is the grace of my lord.
And now let my lord on his handmaid look down, and give ear to her word."
Thereat, in the witness of all, she drew forth, and (uplifting her head)
Showed the Apple of Life, which who tastes, tastes not death. "And this apple," she said,
"Last night was delivered to me, that thy servant should eat, and not die.
But I said to the soul of thy servant, 'Not so. For behold, what am I?
That the King, in his glory and gladness, should cease from the light of the sun,
Whiles I, that am least of his slaves, in my shame and abasement live on.'
For not sweet is the life of thy servant, unless to thy servant my lord
Stretch his hand, and show favor. For surely the frown of a king is a sword,
But the smile of the King is as honey that flows from the clefts of the rock,
And his grace is as dew that from Horeb descends on the heads of the flock:
In the King is the heart of a host: the King's strength is an army of men:
And the wrath of the King is a lion that roareth by night from his den:

But as grapes from the vines of En-Gedi are favors that fall from his hands,
And as towers on the hill-tops of Shenir the throne of King Solomon stands.
And for this, it were well that forever the King, who is many in one,
Should sit, to be seen through all time, on a throne 'twixt the moon and the sun!
For how shall one lose what he hath not? Who hath, let him keep what he hath.
Wherefore I to the King give this apple."

Then great was King Solomon's wrath.
And he rose, rent his garment, and cried, "Woman, whence came this apple to thee?"
But when he was 'ware of the truth, then his heart was awakened. And he
Knew at once that the man who, erewhile, unawares coming to him, had brought
That Apple of Life was, indeed, GOD's good Angel of Death. And he thought
"In mercy, I doubt not, when man's eyes were opened, and made to see plain
All the wrong in himself, and the wretchedness, GOD sent to close them again
For man's sake, his last friend upon earth — Death, the servant of GOD, who is just.
Let man's spirit to Him whence it cometh return, and his dust to the dust!"

Then the Apple of Life did King Solomon seal in an urn that was signed
With the seal of Oblivion: and summoned the Spirits that walk in the wind
Unseen on the summits of mountains, where never the eagle yet flew;
And these he commanded to bear far away, — out of reach, out of view,
Out of hope, out of memory, — higher than Ararat buildeth his throne,
In the Urn of Oblivion the Apple of Life.

But on green jasper-stone
Did the King write the story thereof for instruction. And Enoch, the seer,
Coming afterward, searched out the meaning. And he that hath ears, let him hear.

THE WANDERER.

Dedication.

TO J. F.

As, in the laurel's murmurous leaves
'T was fabled, once, a Virgin dwelt;
Within the poet's page yet heaves
The poet's Heart, and loves or grieves
Or triumphs, as it felt.

A human spirit here records
The annals of its human strife.
A human hand hath touched these chords.
These songs may all be idle words:
And yet — they once were life.

I gave my harp to Memory.
She sung of hope, when hope was young,
Of youth, as youth no more may be;
And, since she sung of youth, to thee,
Friend of my youth, she sung.

For all youth seeks, all manhood needs,
All youth and manhood rarely find:
A strength more strong than codes or creeds,
In lofty thoughts and lovely deeds
Revealed to heart and mind;

A staff to stay, a star to guide;
A spell to soothe, a power to raise;
A faith by fortune firmly tried;
A judgment resolute to preside
O'er days at strife with days.

O large in lore, in nature sound!
O man to me, of all men, dear!
All these in thine my life hath found,
And force to tread the rugged ground
Of daily toil, with cheer.

Accept — not these, the broken cries
Of days receding far from me —
But all the love that in them lies,
The man's heart in the melodies,
The man's heart honoring thee!

Sighing I sung; for some sublime
Emotion made my music jar:
The forehead of this restless time
Pales in a fervid, passionate clime,
Lit by a changeful star;

And o'er the Age's threshold, traced
In characters of hectic fire,
The name of that keen, fervent-faced
And toiling seraph, hath been placed,
Which men have called Desire.

But thou art strong where, even of old,
The old heroic strength was rare,
In high emotions self-controlled,
And insight keen, but never cold,
To lay all falsehood bare;

Despising all those glittering lies
Which in these days can fool mankind;
But full of noble sympathies
For what is genuinely wise,
And beautiful, and kind.

And thou wilt pardon all the much
Of weakness which doth here abound,
Till music, little prized as such,
With thee find worth from one true touch
Of nature in its sound.

Though mighty spirits are no more,
Yet spirits of beauty still remain.
Gone is the Seer that, by the shore
Of lakes as limpid as his lore,
Lived to one ceaseless strain

And strenuous melody of mind.
But one there rests that hath the power
To charm the midnight moon, and bind
All spirits of the sweet south-wind,
And steal from every shower

That sweeps green England cool and clear,
The violet of tender song.
Great Alfred! long may England's ear
His music fill, his name be dear
To English bosoms long!

And one . . . in sacred silence sheathed
That name I keep, my verse would shame.
The name my lips in prayer first breathed
Was his: and prayer hath yet bequeathed
Its silence to that name; —

Which yet an age remote shall hear,
Borne on the fourfold wind sublime
By Fame, where, with some faded year
These songs shall sink, like leaflets sere,
In avenues of Time.

Love on my harp his finger lays ;
His hand is held against the chords.
My heart upon the music weighs,
And, beating, hushes foolish praise
From desultory words :

And Childhood steals, with wistful grace,
'Twixt him and me ; an infant hand
Chides gently back the thoughts that chase
The forward hour, and turns my face
To that remembered land

Of legend, and the Summer sky,
And all the wild Welsh waterfalls,
And haunts where he, and thou, and I
Once wandered with the wandering Wye,
And scaled the airy walls

Of Chepstow, from whose ancient height
We watched the liberal sun go down ;
Then onward, through the gradual night,
Till, ere the moon was fully bright,
We supped in Monmouth Town.

And though, dear friend, thy love retains
The choicest sons of song in fee,
To thee not less I pour these strains,
Knowing that in thy heart remains
A little place for me.

Nor wilt thou all forget the time
Though it be past, in which together,
On many an eve, with many a rhyme
Of old and modern bards sublime
We soothed the summer weather :

And, citing all he said or sung
With praise reserved for bards like him,
Spake of that friend who dwells among
The Apennine, and there hath strung
A harp of Anakim ;

Than whom a mightier master never
Touched the deep chords of hidden things ;
Nor error did from truth dissever
With keener glance ; nor made endeavor
To rise on bolder wings

In those high regions of the soul
Where thought itself grows dim with awe.
But now the star of eve hath stole
Through the deep sunset, and the whole
Of heaven begins to draw

The darkness round me, and the dew.
And my pale Muse doth fold her eyes.
Adieu, my friend ; my guide, adieu !
May never night, 'twixt me and you,
With thoughts less fond arise !

THE AUTHOR.

FLORENCE, September 24, 1857.

PROLOGUE.

PART I.

SWEET are the rosy memories of the lips,
That first kissed ours, albeit they kiss no more :
Sweet is the sight of sunset-sailing ships,
Although they leave us on a lonely shore :
Sweet are familiar songs, though Music dips
Her hollow shell in Thought's forlornest wells :
And sweet, though sad, the sound of midnight bells,
When the oped casement with the night-rain drips.

There is a pleasure which is born of pain :
The grave of all things hath its violet.
Else why, through days which never come again,
Roams Hope with that strange longing, like Regret ?
Why put the posy in the cold dead hand ?
Why plant the rose above the lonely grave ?
Why bring the corpse across the salt sea-wave ?
Why deem the dead more near in native land ?

Thy name hath been a silence in my life
So long, it falters upon language now,
O more to me than sister or than wife
Once . . . and now — nothing ! It is hard to know
That such things have been, and are not, and yet
Life loiters, keeps a pulse at even measure,
And goes upon its business and its pleasure,
And knows not all the depths of its regret.

Thou art not in thy picture, O my friend!
The years are sad and many since I saw thee,
And seem with me to have survived their end.
Far otherwise than thus did memory draw thee
I ne'er shall know thee other than thou wast.
Yet save, indeed, the same sad eyes of old,
And that abundant hair's warm silken gold,
Thou art changed, if this be like the look thou hast.

Changed! There the epitaph of all the years
Was sounded! I am changed too. Let it be.
Yet is it sad to know my latest tears
Were faithful to a memory, — not to thee.
Nothing is left us! nothing — save the soul.
Yet even the immortal in us alters too.
Who is it his old sensations can renew?
Slowly the seas are changed. Slow ages roll

The mountains to a level. Nature sleeps,
And dreams her dream, and to new work awakes
After a hundred years are in the deeps.
But Man is changed before a wrinkle breaks
The brow's sereneness, or the curls are gray.
We stand within the flux of sense: the near
And far change place: and we see nothing clear.
That 's false to-morrow which was true to-day.

Ah, could the memory cast her spots, as do
The snake's brood theirs in spring! and be once more
Wholly renewed, to dwell i' the time that 's new,
With no reiterance of those pangs of yore.

Peace, peace! My wild song will go wandering
Too wantonly, down paths a private pain
Hath trodden bare. What was it jarred the strain?
Some crusht illusion, left with crumpled wing

Tangled in Music's web of twinéd strings —
That started that false note, and cracked the tune
In its beginning. Ah, forgotten things
Stumble back strangely! And the ghost of June
Stands by December's fire, cold, cold! and puts
The last spark out.
How could I sing aright
With those old airs haunting me all the night
And those old steps that sound when daylight shuts?

For back she comes, and moves reproachfully,
The mistress of my moods, and looks bereft
(Cruel to the last!) as though 't were I, not she,
That did the wrong, and broke the spell, and left
Memory comfortless.
Away! away!
Phantoms, about whose brows the bindweed clings,
Hopeless regret!
In thinking of these things
Some men have lost their minds, and others may.

Yet, O, for one deep draught in this dull hour!
One deep, deep draught of the departed time;
O, for one brief strong pulse of ancient power,
To beat and breathe through all the valves of rhyme!
Thou, Memory, with the downward eyes, that art
The cupbearer of gods, pour deep and long,
Brim all the vacant chalices of song
With health! Droop down thine urn. I hold my heart.

One draught of what I shall not taste again,
Save when my brain with thy dark wine is brimmed, —
One draught! and then straight onward, spite of pain,
And spite of all things changed, with gaze undimmed,
Love's footsteps through the waning Past to explore
Undaunted; and to carve, in the wan light
Of Hope's last outposts, on Song's utmost height
The sad resemblance of an hour no more.

Midnight, and love, and youth, and Italy!
Love in the land where love most lovely seems!
Land of my love, though I be far from thee,
Lend, for love's sake, the light of thy moonbeams,
The spirit of thy cypress-groves, and all
Thy dark-eyed beauty, for a little while
To my desire. Yet once more let her smile
Fall o'er me: o'er me let her long hair fall,

The lady of my life, whose lovely eyes
Dreaming, or waking, lure me. I shall know her
By Love's own planet o'er her in the skies,
And Beauty's blossom in the grass below her!
Dreaming, or waking, in her soft, sad gaze
Let my heart bathe, as on that fated night
I saw her, when my life took in the sight
Of her sweet face for all its nights and days.

Her winsome head was bare: and she had twined
Through its rich curls wild red anemones;
One stream of her soft hair strayed unconfined
Down her ripe cheek, and shadowed her deep eyes.
The bunch of sword-grass fell from her loose hand.
Her modest foot beneath its snowy skirt
Peeped, and the golden daisy was not hurt.
Stately, yet slight, she stood, as fairies stand.

Under the blesséd darkness unreproved
We were alone, in that blest hour of time,
Which first revealed to us how much we loved,
'Neath the thick starlight. The young night sublime
Hung trembling o'er us. At her feet I knelt,
And gazed up from her feet into her eyes.
Her face was bowed: we breathed each other's sighs:
We did not speak: not move: we looked: we felt.

The night said not a word. The breeze was dead.
The leaf lay without whispering on the tree,
As I lay at her feet. Droopt was her head:
One hand in mine: and one still pensively
Went wandering through my hair. We were together.
How? Where? What matter? Somewhere in a dream,
Drifting, slow drifting, down a wizard stream:
Whither? Together: then what matter whither?

It was enough for me to clasp her hand:
To blend with her love-looks my own: no more.
Enough (with thoughts like ships that cannot land,
Blown by faint winds about a magic shore)
To realize, in each mysterious feeling,
The droop of the warm cheek so near my own:
The cool white arm about my shoulder thrown:
Those exquisite frail feet, where I was kneeling.

How little know they life's divinest bliss,
That know not to possess and yet refrain!

Let the young Psyche roam, a fleeting kiss: —
Grasp it — a few poor grains of dust remain.
See how those floating flowers, the butterflies,
Hover the garden through, and take no root!
Desire forever hath a flying foot.
Free pleasure comes and goes beneath the skies.

Close not thy hand upon the innocent joy
That trusts itself within thy reach. It may,
Or may not, linger. Thou canst but destroy
The wingéd wanderer. Let it go or stay.
Love thou the rose, yet leave it on its stem.
Think! Midas starved by turning all to gold.
Blesséd are those that spare, and that withhold.
Because the whole world shall be trusted then.

The foolish Faun pursues the unwilling Nymph
That culls her flowers beside the precipice,
Or dips her shining ankles in the lymph:
But, just when she must perish or be his,
Heaven puts an arm out. She is safe. The shore
Gains some new fountain; or the lilied lawn
A rarer sort of rose: but, ah, poor Faun!
To thee she shall be changed forevermore.

Chase not too close the fading rapture. Leave
To Love his long auroras, slowly seen.
Be ready to release, as to receive.
Deem those the nearest, soul to soul, between
Whose lips yet lingers reverence on a sigh.
Judge what thy sense can reach not, most thine own,
If once thy soul hath seized it. The unknown
Is life to love, religion, poetry.

The moon had set. There was not any light,
Save of the lonely legioned watch-stars pale
In outer air, and what by fits made bright
Hot oleanders in a rosy vale
Searched by the lamping fly, whose little spark
Went in and out, like passion's bashful hope.
Meanwhile the sleepy globe began to slope
A ponderous shoulder sunward through the dark,

And the night passed in beauty like a dream.
Aloof in those dark heavens paused Destiny,
With her last star descending in the gleam
Of the cold morrow, from the emptied sky.
The hour, the distance from her old self, all
The novelty and loneness of the place,
Had left a lovely awe on that fair face,
And all the land grew strange and magical.

As droops some billowing cloud to the crouched hill,
Heavy with all heaven's tears, for all earth's care,
She drooped unto me, without force or will,
And sank upon my bosom, murmuring there
A woman's inarticulate, passionate words.
O moment of all moments upon earth!
O life's supreme! How worth, how wildly worth,
Whole worlds of flame, to know this world affords

What even Eternity cannot restore!
When all the ends of life take hands, and meet
Round centres of sweet fire. Ah, never more,
Ah never, shall the bitter with the sweet
Be mingled so in the pale after-years!
One hour of life immortal spirits possess.

This drains the world, and leaves but weariness,
And parching passion, and perplexing tears.

Sad is it, that we cannot even keep
That hour to sweeten life's last toil: but Youth
Grasps all, and leaves us: and, when we would weep,
We dare not let our tears flow lest, in truth,
They fall upon our work which must be done.
And so we bind up our torn hearts from breaking:
Our eyes from weeping, and our brows from aching:
And follow the long pathway all alone.

O moment of sweet peril, perilous sweet!
When woman joins herself to man; and man
Assumes the full-lived woman, to complete
The end of life, since human life began!
When in the perfect bliss of union,
Body and soul triumphal rapture claim,
When there 's a spirit in blood, in spirit a flame,
And earth's lone hemispheres glow, fused in one!

Rare moment of rare peril! . . . The bard's song,
The mystic's musing fancy. Did there ever
Two perfect souls, in perfect forms, belong
Perfectly to each other? Never, never!
Perilous were such moments, for a touch
Might mar their clear perfection. Exquisite
Even for the peril of their frail delight.
Such things man feigns: such seeks: but finds not such.

No! for 't is in ourselves our love doth grow:
And, when our love is fully risen within us,
Round the first object doth it overflow,
Which, be it fair or foul, is sure to win us
Out of ourselves. We clothe with our own nature
The man or woman its first want doth find.
The leafless prop with our own buds we bind,
And hide in blossoms: fill the empty feature

With our own meanings: even prize defects
Which keep the mark of our own choice upon
The chosen: bless each fault whose spot protects
Our choice from possible confusion
With the world's other creatures: we believe them
What most we wish, the more we find they are not:
Our choice once made, with our own choice we war not:
We worship them for what ourselves we give them.

Doubt is this otherwise. . . . When fate removes
The unworthy one from our reluctant arms,
We die with that lost love to other loves,
And turn to its defects from other charms.
And nobler forms, where moved those forms, may move
With lingering looks: our cold farewells we wave them.
We loved our lost loves for the love we gave them,
And not for anything they gave our love.

Old things return not as they were in Time.
Trust nothing to the recompense of Chance,
Which deals with novel forms. This falling rhyme
Fails from the flowery steeps of old romance,
Down that abyss which Memory droops above,
And, gazing out of hopelessness down there,
I see the shadow creep through Youth's gold hair
And white Death watching over red-lipped Love.

PART II.

THE soul lives on. What lives on with the soul?
Glimpses of something better than her best;
Truer than her truest: motion to a pole
Beyond the zones of this orb's dimness guest:
And (since life dies not with the first dead bliss)
Blind notions of some meaning moved through time,
Some purpose in the deeps of the sublime,
That stirs a pulse here, could we find out this.

Visions and noises rouse us. I discern
Even in change some comfort, O Beloved!
Suns rise and set; stars vanish and return;
But never quite the same. And life is moved
Toward new experience. Every eve and morn
Descends and springs with increase on the world.
And what is death but life in this life furled?
The outward cracks, the inward life is born.

Friends pass beyond the borders of this Known,
And draw our thoughts up after them. We say
"They are: but their relations now are done
With Nature, and the plan of night and day."
If never mortal man from this world's light
Did pass away to that surrounding gloom,
'T were well to doubt the life beyond the tomb;
But now is Truth's dark side revealed to sight.

Father of spirits! Thine all secrets be.
I bless Thee for the light Thou hast revealed,
And that Thou hidest. Part of me I see,
And part of me Thy wisdom hath concealed,
Till the new life divulge it. Lord, imbue me
With will to work in this diurnal sphere,
Knowing myself my life's day-laborer here,
Where evening brings the day's work's wages to me.

I work my work. All its results are Thine.
I know the loyal deed becomes a fact
Which Thou wilt deal with: nor will I repine
Although I miss the value of the act.
Thou carest for the creatures: and the end
Thou seest. The world unto Thy hands I leave:
And to Thy hands my life. I will not grieve
Because I know not all Thou dost intend.

Something I know. Oft, shall it come about
When every heart is full with hope for man
The horizon straight is darkened, and a doubt
Clouds all. The work the world so well began
Wastes down, and by some deed of shame is finished.
Ah yet, I will not be dismayed: nor though
The good cause flourish fair, and Freedom flow
All round, my watch beyond shall be diminished.

What seemed the triumph of the Fiend at length
Might be the effort of some dying Devil,
Permitted to put forth his fullest strength
To lose it all forever. While, the evil
Whose cloven crest our pæans float above
Might have been less than what unnoticed lies
'Neath our rejoicings. Which of us is wise?
We know not what we mourn: nor why we love.

But teach me, O Omnipotent, since strife,
Sorrow, and pain are but occurrences

Of that condition through which flows my life,
Not part of me, the immortal, whom distress
Cannot retain, to vex not thought for these:
But to be patient, bear, forbear, restrain,
And hold my spirit pure above my pain.
No star that looks through life's dark lattices,

But what gives token of a world elsewhere.
I bless Thee for the loss of all things here
Which proves the gain to be: the hand of Care
That shades the eyes from earth, and beckons near
The rest which sweetens all: the shade Time throws
On Love's pale countenance, that he may gaze
Across Eternity for better days
Unblinded; and the wisdom of all woes:

I bless Thee for the life Thou gavest, albeit
It hath known sorrow: for the sorrow's self
I bless Thee; and the gift of wings to flee it,
Led by this spirit of song, — this ministering elf,
That to sweet uses doth unwind my pain,
And spin his palace out of poison-flowers,
To float, an impulse, through the live-long hours,
From sky to sky, on Fancy's glittering skein.

Aid me, sweet Spirit, escaping from the throng
Of those that raise the Corybantic shout,
And barbarous, dissonant cymbal's clash prolong,
In fear lest any hear the God cry out,
Now that the night resumes her bleak retreat
In these dear lands, footing the unwandered waste
Of Loss, to walk in Italy, and taste
A little while of what was once so sweet.

PART III.

Nurse of an ailing world, belovéd Night!
Our days are fretful children, weak to bear
A little pain: they wrangle, wound, and fight
Each other, weep, and sicken, and despair.
Thou, with thy motherly hand that healeth care,
Stillest our little noise: rebukest one,
Soothest another: blamest tasks undone:
Refreshest jaded hope; and teachest prayer.

Thine is the mother's sweet hush-hush, that stills
The flutterings of a plaintive heart to rest.
Thine is the mother's medicining hand that fills
Sleep's opiate: thine the mother's patient breast:
Thine, too, the mother's mute reproachful eyes,
That gently look our angry noise to shame
When all is done: we dare not meet their blame:
They are so silent, and they are so wise.

Thou that from this lone casement, while I write,
Seen in the shadowy upspring, swift dost post
Without a sound the polar star to light,
Not idly did the Chaldee shepherds boast
By thy stern lights man's life aright to read.
All day he hides himself from his own heart,
Swaggers and struts, and plays his foolish part:
Thou only seest him as he is indeed.

For who could feign false worth, or give the nod
Among his fellows, or this dust disown,
With nought between him and those lights of God,
Left awfully alone with the Alone?
Who vaunt high words, whose least heart's beating jars

The hush of sentinel worlds that take mute note
Of all beneath yon judgment plains remote? —
A universal cognizance of stars!

And yet, O gentlest angel of the Lord!
Thou leadest by the hand the artisan
Away from work. Thou bringest, on ship-board,
When gleam the dead-lights, to the lonely man
That turns the wheel, a blesséd memory
Of apple-blossoms, and the mountain vales
About his little cottage in Green Wales,
Miles o'er the ridges of the rolling sea.

Thou bearest divine forgiveness amongst men.
Relenting Anger pauses by the bed
Where Sleep looks so like Death. The absent then
Return; and Memory beckons back the dead.
Thou helpest home (thy balmy hand it is!)
The hard-worked husband to the pale-cheeked wife,
And hushest up the poor day's household strife
On marriage pillows, with a good-night kiss.

Thou bringest to the wretched and forlorn
Woman, that down the glimmering by-street hovers,
A dream of better days: the gleam of corn
About her father's field, and her first lover's
Grave, long forgotten in the green churchyard:
Voices, long-stilled, from purer hours, before
The rushlight, Hope, went out; and, through the door
Of the lone garret, when the nights were hard,

Hunger, the wolf, put in his paw, and found her
Sewing the winding-sheet of Youth, alone;
And griped away the last cold comforts round her: —
Her little bed; the mean clothes she had on:
Her mother's picture — the sole saint she knew:
Till nothing else was left for the last crust
But the poor body, and the heart's young trust
In its own courage: and so these went too.

Home from the heated Ball flusht Beauty stands,
Musing beside her costly couch alone:
But while she loosens, faint, with jewelled hands,
The diamonds from her dark hair, one by one,
Thou whisperest in her empty heart the name
Of one that died heart-broken for her sake
Long since, and all at once the coiled hell-snake
Turns stinging in his egg, — and pomp is shame.

Thou comest to the man of many pleasures
Without a joy, that, soulless, plays for souls,
Whose life's a squandered heap of plundered treasures,
While, listless loitering by, the moment rolls
From nothing on to nothing. From the shelf
Perchance he takes a cynic book. Perchance
A dead flower stains the leaves. The old romance
Returns. Ere morn, perchance, he shoots himself.

Thou comest, with a touch of scorn, to me,
That o'er the broken wine-cup of my youth
Sit brooding here, and pointest silently
To thine unchanging stars. Yes! yes! in truth,
They seem more reachless now than when of yore
Above the promist land I watcht them shine,
And all among their cryptic serpentine
Went climbing Hope, new planets to explore.

Not for the flesh that fades—although decay
This thronged metropolis of sense o'erspread:
Not for the joys of youth, that fleet away
When the wise swallows to the south are fled;
Not that, beneath the law which fades the flower,
An earthly hope should wither in the cells
Of this poor earthly house of life, where dwells
Unseen the solitary Thinking-Power;

But that where fades the flower the weed should flourish;
For all the baffled efforts to achieve
The imperishable from the things that perish,
For broken vows, and weakened will, I grieve.
Knowing that night of all is creeping on
Wherein can no man work, I sorrow most
For what is gained, and not for what is lost;
Nor mourn alone what 's undone, but what 's done.

What light, from yonder windless cloud released,
Is widening up the peaks of yon black hills?
It is the full moon in the mystic east,
Whose coming half the unravisht darkness fills
Till all among the ribbed light cloudlets pale,
From shore to shore of sapphrine deeps divine,
The orbéd splendor seems to slide and shine
Aslope the rolling vapors in the vale.

Abroad the stars' majestic light is flung,
And they fade brightening up the steps of Night.
Cold mysteries of the midnight! that, among
The sleeps and pauses of this world, in sight,
Reveal a doubtful hope to wild Desire;
Which, hungering for the sources of the suns,
Makes moan beyond the blue Septentrions,
And spidery Saturn in his webs of fire;

Whether the unconscious destinies of man
Move with the motions of your spheréd lights,
And his brief course, foredoomed ere he began,
Your shining symbols fixed in reachless heights,
Or whether all the purpose of his pain
Be shut in his wild heart and feverish will,
He knows no more than this:—that you are still,
But he is moved: he goes, but you remain.

Fooled was the human vanity that wrote
Strange names in astral fire on yonder pole.
Who and what were they—in what age remote—
That scrawled weak boasts on yon sidereal scroll?
Orion shines. Now seek for Nimrod. Where?
Osiris is a fable, and no more:
But Sirius burns as brightly as of yore.
There is no shade on Berenice's hair.

You that outlast the Pyramids, as they
Outlast their founders, tell us of our doom!
You that see Love depart, and Error stray,
And Genius toiling at a splendid tomb,
Like those Egyptian slaves: and Hope deceived:
And Strength still failing when the goal is near:
And Passion parcht: and Rapture claspt to Fear:
And Trust betrayed: and Memory bereaved!

Vain question! Shall some other voice declare
What my soul knows not of herself? Ah no!
Dumb patient Monster, grieving everywhere,
Thou answerest nothing which I did not know.
The broken fragments of ourselves we seek
In alien forms, and leave our lives behind.

In our own memories our graves we find.
And when we lean upon our hearts, they break.

I seem to see 'mid yonder glimmering spheres
Another world: — not that our prayers record,
Wherein our God shall wipe away all tears,
And never voice of mourning shall be heard;
But one between the sunset and moon-rise:
Near night, yet neighboring day: a twilit land,
And peopled by a melancholy band —
The souls that loved and failed — with hopeless eyes;

More like that Hades of the antique creeds; —
A land of vales forlorn, where Thought shall roam
Regretful, void of wholesome human deeds,
An endless, homeless pining after home,
To which all sights and sounds shall minister
In vain: — white roses glimmering all alone
In an evening light, and, with his haunting tone,
The advancing twilight's shard-born trumpeter.

A world like this world's worst come back again;
Still groaning 'neath the burthen of a Fall:
Eternal longing with eternal pain,
Want without hope, and memory saddening all.
All congregated failure and despair
Shall wander there, through some old maze of wrong: —
Ophelia drowning in her own death-song,
And First-Love strangled in his golden hair.

Ah well, for those that overcome, no doubt
The crowns are ready; strength is to the strong.

But we — but we — weak hearts that grope about
In darkness, with a lamp that fails along
The lengthening midnight, dying ere we reach
The bridal doors! O, what for us remains,
But mortal effort with immortal pains?
And yet — God breathed a spirit into each!

I know this miracle of the soul is more
Than all the marvels that it looks upon.
And we are kings whose heritage was before
The spheres, and owes no homage to the sun.
In my own breast a mightier world I bear
Than all those orbs on orbs about me rolled;
Nor are you kinglier, stars, though throned on gold,
And given the empires of the midnight-air.

For I, too, am undying as you are.
O teach me calm, and teach me self-control: —
To sphere my spirit like yon fixéd star
That moves not ever in the utmost pole,
But whirls, and sleeps, and turns all heaven one way.
So, strong as Atlas, should the spirit stand,
And turn the great globe round in her right hand,
For recreation of her sovereign sway.

Ah yet! — For all, I shall not use my power,
Nor reign within the light of my own home,
Till speculation fades, and that strange hour
Of the departing of the soul is come;
Till all this wrinkled husk of care falls by,
And my immortal nature stands upright
In her perpetual morning, and the light
Of suns that set not on Eternity!

BOOK I.—IN ITALY.

THE MAGIC LAND.

By woodland belt, by ocean bar,
The full south breeze our foreheads fanned,
And, under many a yellow star,
We dropped into the Magic Land.

There, every sound and every sight
Means more than sight or sound elsewhere;
Each twilight star a twofold light;
Each rose a double redness, there.

By ocean bar, by woodland belt,
Our silent course a syren led,
Till dark in dawn began to melt,
Through the wild wizard-work o'erhead.

A murmur from the violet vales!
A glory in the goblin dell!
There Beauty all her breast unveils,
And Music pours out all her shell.

We watched, toward the land of dreams,
The fair moon draw the murmuring main;
A single thread of silver beams
Was made the monster's rippling chain.

We heard far off the syren's song;
We caught the gleam of sea-maid's hair.
The glimmering isles and rocks among,
We moved through sparkling purple air.

Then Morning rose, and smote from far,
Her elfin harps o'er land and sea;
And woodland belt, and ocean bar,
To one sweet note, sighed "Italy!"

DESIRE.

The golden Planet of the Occident
Warm from his bath comes up, i' the rosy air,
And you may tell which way the Daylight went,
Only by his last footsteps shining there:
For now he dwells
Sea-deep o' the other shore of the world,
And winds himself in the pink-mouthéd shells;
Or, with his dusky, sun-dyed Priest,
Walks in the gardens of the gorgeous East;
Or hides in Indian hills; or saileth where
Floats, curiously curled,
Leagues out of sight and scent of spicy trees,
The cream-white nautilus on sapphrine seas.

But here the Night from the hill-top yonder
Steals all alone, nor yet too soon;
I have sighed for, and sought for, her;
sadder and fonder
(All through the lonely and lingering noon)
Than a maiden that sits by the lattice to ponder
On vows made in vain, long since, under the moon.
Her dusky hair she hath shaken free,
And her tender eyes are wild with love;
And her balmy bosom lies bare to me.
She hath lighted the seven sweet Pleiads above,
She is breathing over the dreaming sea,
She is murmuring low in the cedar grove;
She hath put to sleep the moaning dove
In the silent cypress-tree.

And there is no voice nor whisper,—
No voice nor whisper,
In the hillside olives all at rest,
Underneath blue-lighted Hesper,
Sinking, slowly, in the liquid west:
For the night's heart knoweth best
Love by silence most exprest.
The nightingales keep mute
Each one his fairy flute,
Where the mute stars look down,
And the laurels close the green seaside:
Only one amorous lute
Twangs in the distant town,
From some lattice opened wide:
The climbing rose and vine are here, are there.

On the terrace, around, above me :
The lone Ledæan * lights from yon enchanted air
Look down upon my spirit, like a spirit's eyes that love me.

How beautiful, at night, to muse on the mountain height,
Moated in purple air, and all alone !
How beautiful, at night, to look into the light
Of loving eyes, when loving lips lean down unto our own !
But there is no hand in mine, no hand in mine,
Nor any tender cheek against me prest :
O stars that o'er me shine, I pine, I pine, I pine,
With hopeless fancies hidden in an ever-hungering breast !

O where, O where is she that should be here,
The spirit my spirit dreameth ?
With the passionate eyes, so deep, so dear,
Where a secret sweetness beameth ?
O sleepeth she, with her soft gold hair
Streaming over the fragrant pillow,
And a rich dream glowing in her ripe cheek,
Far away, I know not where,
By lonely shores, where the tumbling billow
Sounds all night in an emerald creek ?

Or doth she lean o'er the casement stone
When the day's dull noise is done with,
And the sceptred spirit remounts alone
Into her long-usurpéd throne,
By the stairs the stars are won with ?
Hearing the white owl call
Where the river draws through the meadows below,
By the beeches brown, and the broken wall,
His silvery, seaward waters, slow
To the ocean bounding all :
With, here a star on his glowing breast,
And, there a lamp down-streaming,
And a musical motion towards the west
Where the long white cliffs are gleaming ;
While, far in the moonlight, lies at rest
A great ship, asleep and dreaming ?

Or doth she linger yet
Among her sisters and brothers,
In the chamber where happy faces are met,
Distinct from all the others ?
As my star up there, be it never so bright,
No other star resembles.
Doth she steal to the window, and strain her sight
(While the pearl in her warm hair trembles)
Over the dark, the distant night,
Feeling something changed in her home yet ;
That old songs have lost their old delight,
And the true soul is not come yet ?
Till the nearest star in sight
Is drowned in a tearful light.

I would that I were nigh her,
Wherever she rest or rove !
My spirit waves as a spiral fire
In a viewless wind doth move.
Go forth, alone, go forth, wild-winged Desire,
Thou art the bird of Jove,
That broodest lone by the Olympian throne ;
And strong to bear the thunders which destroy,
Or fetch the ravisht, flute-playing Phrygian boy ;
Go forth, across the world, and find my love !

FATALITY.

I HAVE seen her, with her golden hair,
And her exquisite primrose face,
And the violet in her eyes ;
And my heart received its own despair —
The thrall of a hopeless grace,
And the knowledge of how youth dies.

Live hair afloat with snakes of gold,
And a throat as white as snow,
And a stately figure and foot ;
And that faint pink smile, so sweet, so cold,
Like a wood anemone, closed below
The shade of an ilex root.

* "How oft, unwearied, have we spent the nights,
Till the Ledæan stars, so famed for love,
Wondered at us from above." — COWLEY.

And her delicate milk-white hand in mine,
And her pensive voice in my ear,
And her eyes downcast as we speak.
I am filled with a rapture, vague and fine;
For there has fallen a sparkling tear
Over her soft, pale cheek.

And I know that all is hopeless now.
And that which might have been,
Had she only waited a year or two,
Is turned to a wild regret, I know,
Which will haunt us both, whatever the scene,
And whatever the path we go.

Meanwhile, for one moment, hand in hand,
We gaze on each other's eyes;
And the red moon rises above us;
We linger with love in the lovely land, —
Italy with its yearning skies,
And its wild white stars that love us.

A VISION.

The hour of Hesperus! the hour when feeling
Grows likest memory, and the full heart swells
With pensive pleasure to the mellow pealing
Of mournful music upon distant bells:
The hour when it seems sweetest to be loved,
And saddest to have loved in days no more.
O love, O life, O lovely land of yore,
Through which, erewhile, these weary footsteps roved,

Was it a vision? Or Irene, sitting,
Lone in her chamber, on her snowy bed,
With listless fingers, lingeringly unknitting
Her silken bodice; and, with bended head,
Hiding in warm hair, half-way to her knee,
Her pearl-pale shoulder, leaning on one arm,
Athwart the darkness, odorous and warm,
To watch the low, full moon set, pensively?

A fragrant lamp burned dimly in the room,
With scarce a gleam in either looking-glass.
The mellow moonlight, through the deep-blue gloom,
Did all along the dreamy chamber pass,
As though it were a little toucht with awe
(Being new-come into that quiet place
In such a quiet way) at the strange grace
Of that pale lady, and what else it saw; —

Rare flowers: narcissi; irises, each crowned;
Red oleander blossoms; hyacinths
Flooding faint fragrance, richly curled all round,
Corinthian, cool columnar flowers on plinths;
Waxen camelias, white and crimson ones;
And amber lilies, and the regal rose,
Which for the breast of queens full-scornful grows;
All pinnacled in urns of carven bronze:

Tables of inwrought stone, true Florentine, —
Olympian circles thronged with Mercuries,
Minervas, little Junos dug i' the green
Of ruined Rome; and Juno's own rich eyes
Vivid on peacock plumes Sidonian:
A ribboned lute, young Music's cradle: books,
Vellumed and claspt: and with bewildered looks,
Madonna's picture, — the old smile grown wan.

From blooméd thickets, firefly-lamped, beneath
The terrace, fluted cool the nightingale.
In at the open window came the breath
Of many a balmy, dim blue, dreaming vale.
At intervals the howlet's note came clear,
Fluttering dark silence through the cypress grove;
An infant breeze from the elf-land of Love,
Lured by the dewy hour, crept, lisping, near.

And now is all the night her own, to make it
Or grave or gay with throngs of waking dreams.

Now grows her heart so ripe, a sigh might shake it
To showers of fruit, all golden as beseems
Hesperian growth. Why not, on nights like this,
Should Daphne out from yon green laurel slip?
A Dryad from the ilex, with white hip
Quivered and thonged to hunt with Artemis?

To-night, what wonder were it, while such shadows
Are taking up such shapes on moonlit mountains,
Such star-flies kindling o'er low emerald meadows,
Such voices floating out of hillside fountains,
If some full face should from the window greet her,
Whose eyes should be new planetary lights,
Whose voice a well of liquid love-delights,
And to the distance sighingly entreat her?

EROS.

What wonder that I loved her thus, that night?
The Immortals know each other at first sight,
And Love is of them.
In the fading light
Of that delicious eve, whose stars even yet
Gild the long dreamless nights, and cannot set,
She passed me, through the silence: all her hair,
Her waving, warm, bright hair neglectfully
Poured round her snowy throat as without care
Of its own beauty.
And when she turned on me
The sorrowing light of desolate eyes divine,
I knew in a moment what our lives must be
Henceforth. It lightened on me then and there,
How she was irretrievably all mine,
I hers, — through time, become eternity.
It could not ever have been otherwise,
Gazing into those eyes.

And if, before I gazed on them, my soul,
Oblivious of her destiny, had followed,
In days forever silent, the control
Of any beauty less divinely hallowed
Than that upon her beautiful white brows,
(The serene summits of all earthly sweetness!)
Straightway the records of all other vows
Of idol-worship faded silently
Out of the folding leaves of memory,
Forever and forever; and my heart became
Pure white at once, to keep in its completeness,
And perfect purity,
Her mystic name.

INDIAN LOVE-SONG.

My body sleeps: my heart awakes.
My lips to breathe thy name are moved
In slumber's ear: then slumber breaks;
And I am drawn to thee, beloved.
Thou drawest me, thou drawest me,
Through sleep, through night. I hear the rills,
And hear the leopard in the hills,
And down the dark I feel to thee.

The vineyards and the villages
Were silent in the vales, the rocks.
I followed past the myrrhy trees,
And by the footsteps of the flocks.
Wild honey, dropt from stone to stone,
Where bees have been, my path suggests.
The winds are in the eagles' nests.
The moon is hid. I walk alone.

Thou drawest me, thou drawest me
Across the glimmering wildernesses,
And drawest me, my love, to thee,
With dove's eyes hidden in thy tresses
The world is many: my love is one.
I find no likeness for my love.
The cinnamons grow in the grove:
The Golden Tree grows all alone.

O who hath seen her wondrous hair!
Or seen my dove's eyes in the woods?
Or found her voice upon the air?
Her steps along the solitudes?

Or where is beauty like to hers?
She draweth me, she draweth me.
I sought her by the incense-tree,
And in the aloes, and in the firs.

Where art thou, O my heart's delight,
With dove's eyes hidden in thy locks?
My hair is wet with dews of night.
My feet are torn upon the rocks.
The cedarn scents, the spices, fail
About me. Strange and stranger seems
The path. There comes a sound of streams
Above the darkness on the vale.

No trees drop gums; but poison flowers
From rifts and clefts all round me fall;
The perfumes of thy midnight bowers,
The fragrance of thy chambers, all
Is drawing me, is drawing me.
Thy baths prepare; anoint thine hair:
Open the window: meet me there:
I come to thee, to thee, to thee!

Thy lattices are dark, my own.
Thy doors are still. My love, look out.
Arise, my dove with tender tone.
The camphor-clusters all about
Are whitening. Dawn breaks silently.
And all my spirit with the dawn
Expands; and, slowly, slowly drawn,
Through mist and darkness moves toward thee.

MORNING AND MEETING.

One yellow star, the largest and the last
Of all the lovely night, was fading slow
(As fades a happy moment in the past)
Out of the changing east, when, yet aglow
With dreams her looks made magical, from sleep
I waked; and oped the lattice. Like a rose
All the red-opening morning 'gan disclose
A ripened light upon the distant steep.

A bell was chiming through the crystal air
From the high convent-church upon the hill.
The folk were loitering by to matin prayer.
The church-bell called me out, and seemed to fill
The air with little hopes. I reached the door
Before the chanted hymn began to rise,
And float its liquid Latin melodies
O'er pious groups about the marble floor.

Breathless, I slid among the kneeling folk.
A little bell went tinkling through the pause
Of inward prayer. Then forth the low chant broke
Among the glooming aisles, that through a gauze
Of sunlight glimmered.
Thickly throbbed my blood.
I saw, dark-tressed in the rose-lit shade,
Many a little dusk Italian maid,
Kneeling with fervent face close where I stood.

The morning, all a misty splendor, shook
Deep in the mighty window's flame-lit webs.
It touched the crowned Apostle with his hook,
And brightened where the sea of jasper ebbs
About those Saints' white feet that stand serene
Each with his legend, each in his own hue
Attired: some beryl-golden: sapphire blue
Some: and some ruby-red: some emerald-green.

Wherefrom, in rainbow-wreaths, the rich light rolled
About the snowy altar, sparkling clean.
The organ groaned and pined, then, growing bold,
Revelled the cherubs' golden wings atween.
And in the light, beneath the music, kneeled
(As pale as some stone Virgin bending solemn
Out of the red gleam of a granite column)
Irene with clasped hands and cold lips sealed.

As one who, pausing on some mountain-height,
Above the breeze that breaks o'er vineyard walls,

Leans to the impulse of a wild delight,
Bows earthward, feels the hills bow too, and falls —
I dropt beside her. Feeling seemed to expand
And close: a mist of music filled the air:
And, when it ceased in heaven, I was aware
That, through a rapture, I had toucht her hand.

THE CLOUD.

With shape to shape, all day,
And change to change, by foreland, firth, and bay,
The cloud comes down from wandering with the wind,
Through gloom and gleam across the green waste seas;
And, leaving the white cliff and lone tower bare
To empty air,
Slips down the windless west, and grows defined
In splendor by degrees.

And, blown by every wind
Of wonder through all regions of the mind,
From hope to fear, from doubt to sweet despite
Changing all shapes, and mingling snow with fire,
The thought of her descends, sleeps o'er the bounds
Of passion, grows, and rounds
Its golden outlines in a gradual light
Of still desire.

ROOT AND LEAF.

The love that deep within me lies
Unmoved abides in conscious power;
Yet in the heaven of thy sweet eyes
It varies every hour.

A look from thee will flush the cheek:
A word of thine awaken tears:
And, ah, in all I do and speak
How frail my love appears!

In yonder tree, Beloved, whose boughs
Are household both to earth and heaven,
Whose leaves have murmured of our vows
To many a balmy even,
The branch that wears the liveliest green,
Is shaken by the restless bird;
The leaves that nighest heaven are seen,
By every breeze are stirred:

But storms may rise, and thunders roll,
Nor move the giant roots below;
So, from the bases of the soul,
My love for thee doth grow.

It seeks the heaven, and trembles there
To every light and passing breath;
But from the heart no storm can tear
Its rooted growth beneath.

WARNINGS.

Beware, beware of witchery!
And fall not in the snare
That lurks and lies in wanton eyes,
Or hides in golden hair:
For the Witch hath sworn to catch thee,
And her spells are on the air.
"Thou art fair, fair, fatal fair,
O Irene!

What is it, what is it,
In the whispers of the leaves?
In the night-wind, when its bosom,
With the shower in it, grieves?
In the breaking of the breaker,
As it breaks upon the beach
Through the silence of the night?
Cordelia! Cordelia!
A warning in my ear —
"Not here! not here! not here!
But seek her yet, and seek her,
Seek her ever out of reach,
Out of reach, and out of sight!"
Cordelia!
Eyes on mine, when none can view me!
And a magic murmur through me!
And a presence out of Fairyland,
Invisible, yet near!
Cordelia!
"In a time which hath not been:
In a land thou hast not seen:
Thou shalt find her, but not now:
Thou shalt meet her, but not here":
Cordelia! Cordelia!
"In the falling of the snow:
In the fading of the year:
When the light of hope is low,
And the last red leaf is sere."
Cordelia!

And my senses lie asleep, fast asleep,
O Irene !
In the chambers of this Sorceress, the South,
In a slumber dim and deep,
She is seeking yet to keep,
Brimful of poisoned perfumes,
The shut blossom of my youth.
O fatal, fatal fair Irene !

But the whispering of the leaves,
And the night-wind, when it grieves,
And the breaking of the breaker,
As it breaks upon the beach
Through the silence of the night,
Cordelia !
Whisper ever in my ear
"Not here ! not here ! not here !
But awake, O wanderer ! seek her,
Ever seek her out of reach,
Out of reach, and out of sight !"
Cordelia !

There is a star above me
Unlike all the millions round it.
There is a heart to love me,
Although not yet I have found it.
And awhile,
O Cordelia, Cordelia !
A light and careless singer,
In the subtle South I linger,
While the blue is on the mountain,
And the bloom is on the peach,
And the fire-fly on the night,
Cordelia !
But my course is ever norward,
And a whisper whispers "Forward !"
Arise, O wanderer, seek her,
Seek her ever out of reach,
Out of reach and out of sight !
Cordelia !
Out of sight,
Cordelia ! Cordelia !
Out of reach, out of sight,
Cordelia !

A FANCY.

How sweet were life, — *this* life, if we
(My love and I) might dwell together
Here beyond the summer sea,
In the heart of summer weather !

With pomegranates on the bough,
And with lilies in the bower ;
And a sight of distant snow,
Rosy in the sunset hour.

And a little house, — no more
In state than suits two quiet lovers ;
And a woodbine round the door,
Where the swallow builds and hovers;

With a silver sickle-moon,
O'er hot gardens, red with roses :
And a window wide, in June,
For serenades when evening closes :

In a chamber cool and simple,
Trellised light from roof to basement ;
And a summer wind to dimple
The white curtain at the casement :

Where, if we at midnight wake,
A green acacia-tree shall quiver
In the moonlight, o'er some lake
Where nightingales sing songs forever.

With a pine-wood dark in sight ;
And a bean-field climbing to us,
To make odors faint at night
Where we roam with none to view us.

And a convent on the hill,
Through its light green olives peeping
In clear sunlight, and so still,
All the nuns, you 'd say, were sleeping.

Seas at distance, seen beneath
Grated garden-wildernesses ; —
Not so far but what their breath
At eve may fan my darling's tresses.

A piano, soft in sound,
To make music when speech wanders,
Poets reverently bound,
O'er whose pages rapture ponders.

Canvas, brushes, hues, to catch
Fleeting forms in vale or mountain :
And an evening star to watch
When all 's still, save one sweet fountain.

Ah ! I idle time away
With impossible fond fancies !
For a lover lives all day
In a land of lone romances.

But the hot light o'er the city
Drops, — and see ! on fire departs.

And the night comes down in pity
To the longing of our hearts.

Bind thy golden hair from falling,
O my love, my one, my own!
'T is for thee the cuckoo 's calling
With a note of tenderer tone.

Up the hillside, near and nearer,
Through the vine, the corn, the flowers,
Till the very air grows dearer,
Neighboring our pleasant bowers.

Now I pass the last Poderè:
There, the city lies behind me.
See her fluttering like a fairy
O'er the happy grass to find me!

ONCE.

A FALLING star that shot across
The intricate and twinkling dark
Vanisht, yet left no sense of loss
Throughout the wide ethereal arc

Of those serene and solemn skies
That round the dusky prospect rose,
And ever seemed to rise, and rise,
Through regions of unreached repose.

Far, on the windless mountain-range,
One crimson sparklet died: the blue
Flushed with a brilliance, faint and strange,
The ghost of daylight, dying too.

But half-revealed, each terrace urn
Glimmered, where now, in filmy flight,
We watched return, and still return,
The blind bats searching air for sight.

With sullen fits of fleeting sound,
Borne half asleep on slumbrous air,
The drowsy beetle hummed around,
And passed, and oft repassed us, there;

Where, hand in hand, our looks alight
With thoughts our pale lips left untold,
We sat, in that delicious night,
On that dim terrace, green and old.

Deep down, far off, the city lay,
When forth from all its spires was swept
A music o'er our souls; and they
To music's midmost meanings leapt;

And, crushing some delirious cry
Against each other's lips, we clung
Together silent, while the sky
Throbbing with sound around us hung:

For, borne from bells on music soft,
That solemn hour went forth through heaven,
To stir the starry airs aloft,
And thrill the purple pulse of even.

O happy hush of heart to heart!
O moment molten through with bliss!
O Love, delaying long to part
That first, fast, individual kiss!

Whereon two lives on glowing lips
Hung clasped, each feeling fold in fold,
Like daisies closed with crimson tips,
That sleep about a heart of gold.

Was it some drowsy rose that moved?
Some dreaming dove's pathetic moan?
Or was it my name from lips beloved?
And was it thy sweet breath, mine own,

That made me feel the tides of sense
O'er life's low levels rise with might,
And pour my being down the immense
Shore of some mystic Infinite?

"O, have I found thee, my soul's soul?
My chosen forth from time and space!
And did we then break earth's control?
And have I seen thee face to face?

"Close, closer to thy home, my breast,
Closer thy darling arms enfold!
I need such warmth, for else the rest
Of life will freeze me dead with cold.

"Long was the search, the effort long,
Ere I compelled thee from thy sphere,
I know not with what mystic song,
I know not with what nightly tear:

"But thou art here, beneath whose eyes
My passion falters, even as some
Pale wizard's taper sinks, and dies,
When to his spell a spirit is come.

"My brow is pale with much of pain:
Though I am young, my youth is gone,
And, shouldst thou leave me lone again,
I think I could not live alone.

"As some idea, half divined,
With tumult works within the brain
Of desolate genius, and the mind
Is vassal to imperious pain,

"For toil by day, for tears by night,
Till, in the sphere of vision brought,
Rises the beautiful and bright
Predestined, but relentless Thought;

"So, gathering up the dreams of years,
Thy love doth to its destined seat
Rise sovran, through the light of tears —
Achieved, accomplisht, and complete!

"I fear not now lest any hour
Should chill the lips my own have prest;
For I possess thee by the power
Whereby I am myself possest.

"These eyes must lose their guiding light:
These lips from thine, I know, must sever:
O looks and lips may disunite,
But ever love is love forever!"

SINCE.

Words like to these were said, or dreamed
(How long since!) on a night divine,
By lips from which such rapture streamed
I cannot deem those lips were mine.

The day comes up above the roofs,
All sallow from a night of rain;
The sound of feet, and wheels, and hoofs
In the blurred street begins again:

The same old toil — no end — no aim!
The same vile babble in my ears;
The same unmeaning smiles: the same
Most miserable dearth of tears.

The same dull sound: the same dull lack
Of lustre in the level gray:
It seems like Yesterday come back
With his old things, and not To-day.

But now and then her name will fall
From careless lips with little praise,
On this dry shell, and shatter all
The smooth indifference of my days.

They chatter of her — deem her light —
The apes and liars! they who know
As well to sound the unfathomed Night
As her impenetrable woe!

And here, where Slander's scorn is spilt,
And gabbling Folly clucks above
Her addled eggs, it feels like guilt,
To know that far away, my love

Her heart on every heartless hour
Is bruising, breaking, for my sake:
While, coiled and numbed, and void of power,
My life sleeps like a winter snake.

I know that at the mid of night,
(When she flings by the glittering stress
Of Pride, that mocks the vulgar sight,
And fronts her chamber's loneliness,)

She breaks in tears, and, overthrown
With sorrowing, weeps the night away,
Till back to his unlovely throne
Returns the unrelenting day.

All treachery could devise hath wrought
Against us: — letters robbed and read:
Snares hid in smiles: betrayal bought:
And lies imputed to the dead.

I will arise, and go to her,
And save her in her own despite;
For in my breast begins to stir
A pulse of its old power and might.

They cannot so have slandered me
But what, I know, if I should call
And stretch my arms to her, that she
Would rush into them, spite of all.

In Life's great lazar-house, each breath
We breathe may bring or spread the pest;
And, woman, each may catch his death
From those that lean upon his breast.

I know how tender friends of me
Have talked with broken hint, and glance:
— The choicest flowers of calumny,
That seem, like weeds, to spring from chance; —

That small, small, imperceptible
Small talk, which cuts like powdered glass

Ground in Tophana — none can tell
Where lurks the power the poison has!

I may be worse than they would prove,
(Who knows the worst of any man?)
But, right or wrong, be sure my love
Is not what they conceive, or can.

Nor do I question what thou art,
Nor what thy life, in great or small,
Thou art, I know, what all my heart
Must beat or break for. That is all.

A LOVE-LETTER.

My love, — my chosen, — but not mine! I send
My whole heart to thee in these words I write;
So let the blotted lines, my soul's sole friend,
Lie upon thine, and there be blest at night.

This flower, whose bruiséd purple blood will stain
The page now wet with the hot tears that fall —
(Indeed, indeed, I struggle to restrain
This weakness, but the tears come, spite of all!)

I plucked it from the branch you used to praise,
The branch that hides the wall. I tend your flowers.
I keep the paths we paced in happier days.
How long ago they seem, those pleasant hours.

The white laburnum's out. Your judas-tree
Begins to shed those crimson buds of his.
The nightingales sing — ah, too joyously!
Who says those birds are sad? I think there is

What in the books we read, which deeper wrings
My heart, so they lie dusty on the shelf.
Ah me, I meant to speak of other things
Less sad. In vain! they bring me to myself.

I know your patience. And I would not cast
New shade on days so dark as yours are grown
By weak and wild repining for the past,
Since it is past forever, O mine own!

For hard enough the daily cross you bear,
Without that deeper pain reflection brings;
And all too sore the fretful household care,
Free of the contrast of remembered things.

But ah! it little profits, that we thrust
From all that 's said, what both must feel, unnamed.
Better to face it boldly, as we must,
Than feel it in the silence, and be shamed.

Irene, I have loved you, as men love
Light, music, odor, beauty, love itself; —
Whatever is apart from, and above
Those daily needs which deal with dust and pelf.

And I had been content, without one thought
Our guardian angels could have blusht to know,
So to have lived and died, demanding nought
Save, living dying, to have loved you so.

My youth was orphaned, and my age will be
Childless. I have no sister. None, to steal
One stray thought from the many thoughts of thee,
Which are the source of all I think and feel.

My wildest wish was vassal to thy will:
My haughtiest hope, a pensioner on thy smile,
Which did with light my barren being fill,
As moonlight glorifies some desert isle.

I never thought to know what I have known, —
The rapture, dear, of being loved by you:

I never thought, within my heart, to own
One wish so blest that you should share it too:

Nor ever did I deem, contemplating
The many sorrows in this place of pain,
So strange a sorrow to my life could cling,
As, being thus loved, to be beloved in vain.

But now we know the best, the worst. We have
Interred, and prematurely, and unknown,
Our youth, our hearts, our hopes, in one small grave,
Whence we must wander, widowed, to our own.

And if we comfort not each other, what
Shall comfort us, in the dark days to come?
Not the light laughter of the world, and not
The faces and the firelight of fond home.

And so I write to you; and write, and write,
For the mere sake of writing to you, dear.
What can I tell you, that you know not? Night
Is deepening through the rosy atmosphere

About the lonely casement of this room,
Which you have left familiar with the grace
That grows where you have been. And on the gloom
I almost fancy I can see your face.

Not pale with pain, and tears restrained for me,
As when I last beheld it; but as first,
A dream of rapture and of poesy,
Upon my youth, like dawn on dark, it burst.

Perchance I shall not ever see again
That face. I know that I shall never see
Its radiant beauty as I saw it then,
Save by this lonely lamp of memory,
With childhood's starry graces lingering yet
I' the rosy orient of young womanhood;
And eyes like woodland violets newly wet;
And lips that left their meaning in my blood!

I will not say to you what I might say
To one less worthily loved, less worthy love.
I will not say . . . "Forget the past. Be gay.
And let the all ill-judging world approve

"Light in your eyes, and laughter on your lip."
I will not say . . . "Dissolve in thought forever
Our sorrowful, but sacred, fellowship."
For that would be, to bid you, dear, dissever

Your nature from its nobler heritage
In consolations registered in heaven,
For griefs this world is barren to assuage,
And hopes to which, on earth, no home is given.

But I would whisper, what forevermore
My own heart whispers through the wakeful night, . . .
"This grief is but a shadow, flung before,
From some refulgent substance out of sight."

Wherefore it happens, in this riddling world,
That, where sin came not, sorrow yet should be;
Why heaven's most hurtful thunders should be hurled
At what seems noblest in humanity;

And we are punished for our purest deeds,
And chastened for our holiest thoughts; . . . alas!
There is no reason found in all the creeds,
Why these things are, nor whence they come to pass.

But in the heart of man, a secret voice
There is, which speaks, and will not be restrained,

Which cries to Grief . . . "Weep on, while I rejoice,
Knowing that, somewhere, all will be explained."

I will not cant that commonplace of friends,
Which never yet hath dried one mourner's tears,
Nor say that grief's slow wisdom makes amends
For broken hearts and desolated years.

For who would barter all he hopes from life,
To be a little wiser than his kind?
Who arm his nature for continued strife,
Where all he seeks for hath been left behind?

But I would say, O pure and perfect pearl
Which I have dived so deep in life to find,
Locked in my heart thou liest. The wave may curl,
The wind may wail above us. Wave and wind,

What are their storm and strife to me and you?
No strife can mar the pure heart's inmost calm.
This life of ours, what is it? A very few
Soon-ended years, and then, — the ceaseless psalm,

And the eternal sabbath of the soul!
Hush! . . . while I write, from the dim Carminé
The midnight angelus begins to roll,
And float athwart the darkness up to me.

My messenger (a man by danger tried)
Waits in the courts below; and ere our star
Upon the forehead of the dawn hath died,
Belovéd one, this letter will be far

Athwart the mountain, and the mist, to you.
I know each robber hamlet. I know all
This mountain people. I have friends, both true
And trusted, sworn to aid whate'er befall.

I have a bark upon the gulf. And I,
If to my heart I yielded in this hour,
Might say . . . "Sweet fellow-sufferer, let us fly!
I know a little isle which doth embower

"A home where exiled angels might forbear
Awhile to mourn for paradise." . . .
But no!
Never, whate'er fate now may bring us, dear,
Shalt thou reproach me for that only woe

Which even love is powerless to console;
Which dwells where duty dies: and haunts the tomb
Of life's abandoned purpose in the soul;
And leaves to hope, in heaven itself, no room.

Man cannot make, but may ennoble, fate,
By nobly bearing it. So let us trust,
Not to ourselves, but God, and calmly wait
Love's orient, out of darkness and of dust.

Farewell, and yet again farewell, and yet
Never farewell, — if farewell mean to fare
Alone and disunited. Love hath set
Our days, in music, to the self-same air;

And I shall feel, wherever we may be,
Even though in absence and an alien clime,
The shadow of the sunniness of thee,
Hovering, in patience, through a clouded time.

Farewell! The dawn is rising, and the light
Is making, in the east, a faint endeavor
To illuminate the mountain peaks. Good night.
Thine own, and only thine, my love, forever.

CONDEMNED ONES.

Above thy child I saw thee bend,
Where in that silent room we sat apart.
I watched the involuntary tear descend;
The firelight was not all so dim, my friend,
But I could read thy heart.

Yet when, in that familiar room,
I strove, so moveless in my place,
To look with comfort in thy face,
That child's young smile was all that I could see
Ever between us in the thoughtful gloom, —
Ever between thyself and me, —
With its bewildering grace.

Life is not what it might have been,
Nor are we what we would!
And we must meet with smiling mien,
And part in careless mood,
Knowing that each retains unseen,
In cells of sense subdued,
A little lurking secret of the blood —
A little serpent-secret rankling keen —
That makes the heart its food.

Yet is there much for grateful tears, if sad ones,
And Hope's young orphans Memory mothers yet;
So let them go, the sunny days we had once,
Our night hath stars that will not ever set.
And in our hearts are harps, albeit not glad ones,
Yet not all unmelodious, through whose strings
The night-winds murmur their familiar things,
Unto a kindred sadness: the sea brings
The spirits of its solitude, with wings
Folden about the music of its lyre,
Thrilled vith deep duals by sublime desire,
Which never can attain, yet ever must aspire,
And glorify regret.

What might have been, I know, is not:
What must be, must be borne:
But, ah! what hath been will not be forgot,
Never, oh! never, in the years to follow!
Though all their summers light a waste forlorn,
Yet shall there be (hid from the careless swallow
And sheltered from the bleak wind in the thorn)
In Memory's mournful but belovéd hollow,
One dear green spot!

Hope, the high will of Heaven
To help us hath not given,
But more than unto most of consolation:
Since heart from heart may borrow
Healing for deep heart-sorrow,
And draw from yesterday, to soothe tomorrow,
The sad, sweet divination
Of that unuttered sympathy, which is
Love's sorceress, and for Love's dear sake,
About us both such spells doth make,
As none can see, and none can break,
And none restrain; — a secret pain
Claspt to a secret bliss!

A tone, a touch,
A little look, may be so much!
Those moments brief, nor often,
When, leaning laden breast to breast,
Pale cheek to cheek, life, long represt,
May gush with tears that leave half blest
The want of bliss they soften.
The little glance across the crowd,
None else can read, wherein there lies
A life of love at once avowed —
The embrace of pining eyes. . . .
So little more had made earth heaven,
That hope to help us was not given!

THE STORM.

Both hollow and hill were as dumb as death,
While the skies were silently changing form;
And the dread forecast of the thunder-storm
Made the crouched land hold in its breath.

But the monstrous vapor as yet was unriven
That was breeding the thunder and lightning and rain;
And the wind that was waiting to ruin the plain
Was yet fast in some far hold of heaven.

So, in absolute absence of stir or strife,
The red land lay as still as a drifted leaf :
The roar of the thunder had been a relief,
To the calm of that death-brooding life.

At the wide-flung casement she stood full height,
With her long rolling hair tumbled all down her back ;
And, against the black sky's supernatural black,
Her white neck gleamed scornfully white.

I could catch not a gleam of her angered eyes
(She was sullenly watching the slow storm roll),
But I felt they were drawing down into her soul
The thunder that darkened the skies.

And how could I feign, in that heartless gloom,
To be carelessly reading that stupid page ?
What harm, if I flung it in anguish and rage,
Her book, to the end of the room ?

"And so, do we part thus forever ?" . . . I said,
"O, speak only one word, and I pardon the rest !"
She drew her white scarf tighter over her breast,
But she never once turned round her head.

"In this wicked old world is there naught to disdain ?
Or" — I groaned — "are those dark eyes such deserts of blindness,
That, O Woman ! your heart must hoard all its unkindness,
For the man on whose breast it hath lain ?

"Leave it nameless, the grave of the grief that is past ;
Be its sole sign the silence we keep for its sake.
I have loved you — lie still in my heart till it break :
As I loved, I must love to the last.

"Speak ! the horrible silence is stifling my soul."
She turned on me at once all the storm in her eyes ;
And I heard the low thunder aloof in the skies,
Beginning to mutter and roll.

She turned — by the lightning revealed in its glare,
And the tempest had clothed her with terror : it clung
To the folds of her vaporous garments, and hung
In the heaps of her heavy wild hair.

But one word broke the silence ; but one ; and it fell
With the weight of a mountain upon me. Next moment
The fierce levin flashed in my eyes. From my comment
She was gone when I turned. Who can tell

How I got to my home on the mountain ? I know
That the thunder was rolling, the lightning still flashing,
The great bells were tolling, my very brain crashing
In my head, a few hours ago :

Then all hushed. In the distance the blue rain receded ;
And the fragments of storm were spread out on the hills ;
Hard by, from my lattice, I heard the far rills
Leaping down their rock-channels, wild-weeded.

The round, red moon was yet low in the air. . . .
O, I knew it, foresaw it, and felt it, before
I heard her light hand on the latch of the door !
When it opened at last, — she was there.

Childlike, and wistful, and sorrowful-eyed,
With the rain on her hair, and the rain on her cheek ;
She knelt down, with her fair forehead fallen and meek
In the light of the moon at my side.

And she called me by every caressing old name
She of old had invented and chosen for me:
She crouched at my feet, with her cheek on my knee,
Like a wild thing grown suddenly tame.

In the world there are women enough, maids or mothers;
Yet, in multiplied millions, I never should find
The symbol of aught in her face, or her mind.
She has nothing in common with others.

And she loves me! This morning the earth, pressed beneath
Her light foot, keeps the print. 'T was no vision last night,
For the lily she dropped, as she went, is yet white
With the dew on its delicate sheath!

THE VAMPYRE.

I FOUND a corpse, with golden hair,
Of a maiden seven months dead.
But the face, with the death in it, still was fair,
And the lips with their love were red.
Rose leaves on a snow-drift shed,
Blood-drops by Adonis bled,
Doubtless were not so red.

I combed her hair into curls of gold,
And I kissed her lips till her lips were warm,
And I bathed her body in moonlight cold,
Till she grew to a living form:
Till she stood up bold to a magic of old,
And walked to a muttered charm —
Life-like, without alarm.

And she walks by me, and she talks by me,
Evermore, night and day;
For she loves me so, that, wherever I go,
She follows me all the way —
This corpse — you would almost say
There pined a soul in the clay.

Her eyes are so bright at the dead of night
That they keep me awake with dread;
And my life-blood fails in my veins, and pales
At the sight of her lips so red:
For her face is as white as the pillow by night
Where she kisses me on my bed:
All her gold hair outspread —
Neither alive nor dead.

I would that this woman's head
Were less golden about the hair:
I would her lips were less red,
And her face less deadly fair.
For this is the worst to bear —
How came that redness there?

'T is my heart, be sure, she eats for her food;
And it makes one's whole flesh creep
To think that she drinks and drains my blood
Unawares, when I am asleep.
How else could those red lips keep
Their redness so damson-deep?

There 's a thought like a serpent, slips
Ever into my heart and head, —
There are plenty of women, alive and human,
One might woo, if one wished, and wed —
Women with hearts, and brains, — ay, and lips
Not so very terribly red.

But to house with a corpse — and she so fair,
With that dim, unearthly, golden hair,
And those sad, serene, blue eyes,
With their looks from who knows where,
Which Death has made so wise,
With the grave's own secret there —
It is more than a man can bear!

It were better for me, ere I came nigh her,
This corpse — ere I looked upon her,
Had they burned my body in flame and fire
With a sorcerer's dishonor.
For when the Devil hath made his lair,
And lurks in the eyes of a fair young woman
(To grieve a man's soul with her golden hair,
And break his heart, if his heart be human),
Would not a saint despair
To be saved by fast or prayer
From perdition made so fair?

CHANGE.

SHE is unkind, unkind !
On the windy hill, to-day,
I sat in the sound of the wind.
I knew what the wind would say.
It said . . . or seemed to my mind . . .
"The flowers are falling away.
The summer," . . . it said, . . . "will
not stay,
And Love will be left behind."

The swallows were swinging themselves
In the leaden-gray air aloft ;
Flitting by tens and twelves,
And returning oft and oft ;
Like the thousand thoughts in me,
That went, and came, and went,
Not letting me even be
Alone with my discontent.

The hard-vext weary vane
Rattled, and moaned and was still,
In the convent over the plain,
By the side of the windy hill.
It was sad to hear it complain,
So fretful, and weak, and shrill,
Again, and again, and in vain,
While the wind was changing his will.

I thought of our walks last summer
By the convent-walls so green ;
Of the first kiss stolen from her,
With no one near to be seen.
I thought (as we wandered on,
Each of us waiting to speak)
How the daylight left us alone,
And left his last light on her cheek.

The plain was as cold and gray
(With its villas like glimmering shells)
As some north-ocean bay.
All dumb in the church were the bells.
In the mist, half a league away,
Lay the little white house where she
dwells.

I thought of her face so bright,
By the firelight bending low
O'er her work so neat and white ;
Of her singing so soft and slow ;
Of her tender-toned "Good-night" ;
But a very few nights ago.

O'er the convent doors, I could see
A pale and sorrowful-eyed
Madonna looking at me,
As when Our Lord first died.

There was not a lizard or spider
To be seen on the broken walls.
The ruts, with the rain, had grown wider
And blacker since last night's falls.
O'er the universal dulness
There broke not a single beam.
I thought how my love at its fulness
Had changed like a change in a dream.

The olives were shedding fast
About me, to left and right,
In the lap of the scornful blast
Black berries and leaflets white.
I thought of the many romances
One wintry word can blight ;
Of the tender and timorous fancies
By a cold look put to flight.

How many noble deeds
Strangled perchance at their birth!
The smoke of the burning weeds
Came up with the steam of the earth,
From the red, wet ledges of soil,
And the sere vines, row over row, —
And the vineyard-men at their toil,
Who sang in the vineyard below.

Last Spring, while I thought of her here,
I found a red rose on the hill.
There it lies, withered and sere !
Let him trust to a woman who will.

I thought how her words had grown colder,
And her fair face colder still,
From the hour whose silence had told her
What has left me heart-broken and ill ;
And "Oh !" I thought, . . . "if I be-
hold her
Walking there with him under the hill !"

O'er the mist, from the mournful city
The blear lamps gleamed aghast, —
— "She has neither justice, nor pity,"
I thought, . . . "all 's over at last !"
The cold eve came. One star
Through a ragged gray gap forlorn
Fell down from some region afar,
And sickened as soon as born.
I thought, "How long and how lone
The years will seem to be,
When the last of her looks is gone,
And my heart is silent in me !"

One streak of scornful gold,
In the cloudy and billowy west,
Burned with a light as cold
As love in a much-wronged breast.

I thought of her face so fair;
Of her perfect bosom and arm;
Of her deep sweet eyes and hair;
Of her breath so pure and warm;
Of her foot so fine and fairy
Through the meadows where she would pass;
Of the sweep of her skirts so airy
And fragrant over the grass.

I thought . . . "Can I live without her
Whatever she do, or say?"
I thought . . . "Can I dare to doubt her,
Now when I have given away
My whole self, body and spirit,
To keep, or to cast aside,
To dower or disinherit, —
To use as she may decide?"

The West was beginning to close
O'er the last light burning there.
I thought . . . "And when that goes,
The dark will be everywhere!"

Oh! well is it hidden from man
Whatever the Future may bring.
The bells in the church began
On a sudden to sound and swing.
The chimes on the gust were caught,
And rolled up the windy height.
I rose, and returned, and thought . . .
"I SHALL NOT SEE HER TO-NIGHT."

A CHAIN TO WEAR.

AWAY! away! The dream was vain.
We meet too soon, or meet too late:
Still wear, as best you may, the chain
Your own hands forged about your fate,
Who could not wait!

What! . . . you had given your life away
Before you found what most life misses?
Forsworn the bridal dream, you say,
Of that ideal love, whose kisses
Are vain as this is!

Well, I have left upon your mouth
The seal I know must burn there yet;
My claim is set upon your youth;
My sign upon your soul is set:
Dare you forget?

And you 'll haunt, I know, where music plays,
Yet find a pain in music's tone;
You 'll blush, of course, when others praise
That beauty scarcely now your own.
What 's done, is done!

For me, you say, the world is wide, —
Too wide to find the grave I seek!
Enough! whatever now betide,
No greater pang can blanch my cheek.
Hush! . . . do not speak.

SILENCE.

WORDS of fire, and words of scorn,
I have written. Let them go!
Words of love — heart-broken, torn,
With this strong and sudden woe.
All my scorn, she could not doubt,
Was but love turned inside out.

Silence, silence, still unstirred;
Long, unbroken, unexplained:
Not one word, one little word,
Even to show her touched or pained:
Silence, silence, all unbroken:
Not a sound, a sign, a token.

Well, let silence gather round
All this shattered life of mine.
Shall I break it by a sound?
Let it grow, and be divine —
Divine as that Prometheus kept
When for his sake the sea-nymph wept.

Let silence settle, still and deep;
As the mist, the thunder-cloud,
O'er the lonely blasted steep,
Which the red bolt hath not bowed,
Settle, to drench out the star,
And cancel the blue vales afar.

In this silence I will sheathe
The sharp edge and point of all!
Not a sigh my lips shall breathe;
Not a groan, whate'er befall.
And let this sworded silence be
A fence 'twixt prying fools and me.

Let silence be about her name,
And o'er the things which once have been:
Let silence cover up my shame,
And annul that face, once seen
In fatal hours, and all the light
Of those eyes extinguish quite.

In silence, I go forth alone
O'er the solemn mystery
Of the deeds which, to be done,
Yet undone in the future lie.
I peer in Time's high nests, and there
Espy the callow brood of Care,

The fledgeless nurslings of Regret,
With beaks forever stretched for food:
But why should I forecount as yet
The ravage of that vulture brood?
O'er all these things let silence stay,
And lie, like snow, along my way.

Let silence in this outraged heart
Abide, and seal these lips forever;
Let silence dwell with me apart
Beside the ever-babbling river
Of that loud life in towns, that runs
Blind to the changes of the suns.

Ah! from what most mournful star,
Wasting down on evening's edge,
Or what barren isle afar
Flung by on some bare ocean ledge,
Came the wicked hag to us,
That changed the fairy revel thus?

There were sounds from sweet guitars
Once, and lights from lamps of amber;
Both went up among the stars
From many a perfumed palace-chamber:
Suddenly the place seemed dead;
Light and music both were fled.

Darkness in each perfumed chamber;
Darkness, silence, in the stars;
Darkness on the lamps of amber;
Silence in the sweet guitars:
Darkness, silence, evermore
Guard empty chamber, moveless door.

NEWS.

News, news, news, my gossiping friends!
I have wonderful news to tell.
A lady, by me, her compliments sends;
And this is the news from Hell:

The Devil is dead. He died resigned,
Though somewhat oppressed by cares;
But his wife, my friends, is a woman of mind,
And looks after her lord's affairs.

I have just come back from that wonderful place,
And kist hands with the Queen down there;
But I cannot describe Her Majesty's face,
It has filled me so with despair.

The place is not what you might suppose:
It is worse in some respects.
But all that I heard there, I must not disclose,
For the lady that told me objects.

The laws of the land are not Salique,
But the King never dies, of course;
The new Queen is young, and pretty, and *chic*,
There are women, I think, that are worse.

But however that be, one thing I know,
And this I am free to tell;
The Devil, my friends, is a woman, just now;
'T is a woman that reigns in Hell.

COUNT RINALDO RINALDI.

'T is a dark-purple, moonlighted midnight:
There is music about on the air.
And, where, through the water, fall flashing
The oars of each gay gondolier,
The lamp-lighted ripples are dashing,
In the musical moonlighted air,
To the music, in merriment; washing,
And splashing, the black marble stair
That leads to the last garden-terrace,
Where many a gay cavalier
And many a lady yet loiter,
Round the Palace in festival there.

'T is a terrace all paven mosaic, —
Black marble, and green malachite;
Round an ancient Venetian Palace,
Where the windows with lampions are bright.
'T is an evening of gala and festival,
Music, and passion, and light.
There is love in the nightingales' throats,
That sing in the garden so well:
There is love in the face of the moon:

There is love in the warm languid glances
Of the dancers adown the dim dances :
There is love in the low languid notes
That rise into rapture, and swell,
From viol, and flute, and bassoon.

The tree that bends down o'er the water
So black, is a black cypress-tree.
And the statue, there, under the terrace,
Mnemosyne's statue must be.
There comes a black gondola slowly
To the Palace in festival there :
And the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Has mounted the black marble stair.

There was nothing but darkness, and midnight,
And tempest, and storm, in the breast
Of the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi,
As his foot o'er the black marble prest : —
The glimmering black marble stair
Where the weed in the green ooze is clinging,
That leads to the garden so fair,
Where the nightingales softly are singing, —
Where the minstrels new music are stringing,
And the dancers for dancing prepare.

There rustles a robe of white satin :
There 's a footstep falls light by the stair :
There rustles a robe of white satin :
There 's a gleaming of soft golden hair :
And the Lady Irene Ricasoli
Stands near the cypress-tree there, —
Near Mnemosyne's statue so fair, —
The Lady Irene Ricasoli,
With the light in her long golden hair.

And the nightingales softly are singing
In the mellow and moonlighted air ;
And the minstrels their viols are stringing ;
And the dancers for dancing prepare.

"Siora," the Count said unto her,
"The shafts of ill-fortune pursue me ;
The old grief grows newer and newer,
The old pangs are never at rest ;
And the foes that have sworn to undo me
Have left me no peace in my breast.
They have slandered, and wronged, and maligned me :
Though they broke not my sword in my hand,
They have broken my heart in my bosom
And sorrow my youth has unmanned.
But I love you, Irene, Irene,
With such love as the wretched alone
Can feel from the desert within them
Which only the wretched have known !
And the heart of Rinaldo Rinaldi
Dreads, Lady, no frown but your own.
To others be all that you are, love —
A lady more lovely than most ;
To me — be a fountain, a star, love,
That lights to his haven the lost ;
A shrine that with tender devotion,
The mariner kneeling, doth deck
With the dank weeds yet dripping from ocean,
And the last jewel saved from the wreck.

"None heeds us, belovéd Irene !
None will mark if we linger or fly.
Amid all the mad masks in yon revel,
There is not an ear or an eye, —
Not one, — that will gaze or will listen ;
And, save the small star in the sky
Which, to light us, so softly doth glisten,
There is none will pursue us, Irene.
O love me, O save me, I die !
I am thine, O be mine, O belovéd !

"Fly with me, Irene, Irene !
The moon drops : the morning is near,
My gondola waits by the garden
And fleet is my own gondolier !"
What the Lady Irene Ricasoli,
By Mnemosyne's statue in stone,
Where she leaned, 'neath the black cypress-tree,
To the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Replied then, it never was known,
And known, now, it never will be.

But the moon hath been melted in morning :
And the lamps in the windows are dead :
And the gay cavaliers from the terrace,
And the ladies they laughed with, are fled ;
And the music is husht in the viols :
And the minstrels, and dancers, are gone ;

VENICE. Page 186.

And the nightingales now in the garden,
From singing have ceased, one by one:
But the Count Rinaldo Rinaldi
Still stands, where he last stood, alone,
'Neath the black cypress-tree, near the water,
By Mnemosyne's statue in stone.

O'er his spirit was silence and midnight,
In his breast was the calm of despair.
He took, with a smile, from a casket
A single soft curl of gold hair, —
A wavy warm curl of gold hair,
And into the black-bosomed water
He flung it athwart the black stair.
The skies they were changing above him;
The dawn, it came cold on the air;
He drew from his bosom a kerchief —
"Would," he sighed, "that her face was less fair!
That her face was less hopelessly fair."
And folding the kerchief, he covered
The eyes of Mnemosyne there.

THE LAST MESSAGE.

Fling the lattice open,
And the music plain you 'll hear;
Lean out of the window,
And you 'll see the lamplight clear.

There, you see the palace
Where the bridal is to-night.
You may shut the window.
Come here, to the light.

Take this portrait with you,
Look well before you go.
She can scarce be altered
Since a year ago.

Women's hearts change lightly,
(Truth both trite and olden!)
But blue eyes remain blue;
Golden hair stays golden.

Once I knew two sisters:
One was dark and grave
As the tomb; one radiant
And changeful as the wave.

Now away, friend, quickly!
Mix among the masks:
Say you are the bride's friend,
If the bridegroom asks.

If the bride have dark hair,
And an olive brow,
Give her this gold bracelet; —
Come and let me know.

If the bride have bright hair,
And a brow of snow,
In the great canal there
Quick the portrait throw:

And you 'll merely give her
This poor faded flower.
Thanks! now leave your stylet
With me for an hour.

You 're my friend: whatever
I ask you now to do,
If the case were altered,
I would do for you.

And you 'll promise me, my mother
Shall never miss her son,
If anything should happen
Before the night is done.

VENICE.

The sylphs and ondines,
And the sea-kings and queens,
Long ago, long ago, on the waves built a city,
As lovely as seems
To some bard, in his dreams,
The soul of his latest love-ditty.
Long ago, long ago, — ah! that was long ago
Thick as gems on the chalices
Kings keep for treasure,
Were the temples and palaces
In this city of pleasure:
And the night broke out shining
With lamps and with festival,
O'er the squares, o'er the streets;
And the soft sea went, pining
With love, through the musical,
Musical bridges, and marble retreats
Of this city of wonder, where dwelt the ondines,
Long ago, and the sylphs, and the sea-kings and queens,
— Ah! that was long ago!
But the sylphs and ondines,
And the sea-kings and queens
Are fled under the waves:

And I glide, and I glide
Up the glimmering tide
Through a city of graves.
Here will I bury my heart,
Wrapt in the dream it dreamed;
One grave more to the many!
One grave as silent as any;
Sculptured about with art, —
For a palace this tomb once seemed.
Light lips have laughed there,
Bright eyes have beamed.
Revel and dance;
Lady and lover!
Pleasure hath quaffed there:
Beauty hath gleamed,
Love wooed Romance.
Now all is over!
And I glide, and I glide
Up the glimmering tide,
'Mid forms silently passing, as silent as any,
Here, 'mid the waves,
In this city of graves
To bury my heart — one grave more to the many!

ON THE SEA.

Come! breathe thou soft, or blow thou bold,
Thy coming be it kind or cold,
Thou soul of the heedless ocean wind; —
Little I rede and little I reck,
Though the mast be snapt on the mizzen-deck,
So thou blow her last kiss from my neck,
And her memory from my mind!

Comrades around the mast,
The welkin is o'ercast:
One watch is wellnigh past —
Out of sight of shore at last!

Fade fast, thou falling shore,
With that fair false face of yore,
And the love, and the life, now o'er!
What she sought, that let her have —
The praise of traitor and knave,
The simper of coward and slave,
And the worm that clings and stings —
The knowledge of nobler things.
But here shall the mighty sea
Make moan with my heart in me,
And her name be torn
By the winds in scorn,
In whose march we are moving free.
I am free, I am free, I am free!
Hark! how the wild waves roar!
Hark! how the wild winds rave!
Courage, true hearts and brave,
Whom Fate can afflict no more!

Comrades, the night is long.
I will sing you an ancient song
Of a tale that was told
In the days of old,
Of a Baron blithe and strong, —
High heart and bosom bold,
To strive for the right with wrong!

"Who left his castled home,
When the Cross was raised in Rome,
And swore on his sword
To fight for the Lord,
And the banners of Christendom.
To die or to overcome!

"In hauberk of mail, and helmet of steel,
And armor of proof from head to heel,
O, what is the wound which he shall feel?
And where the foe that shall make him reel?
True knight on whose crest the cross doth shine!
They buckled his harness, brought him his steed —
A stallion black of the land's best breed —
Belted his spurs, and bade him God-speed
'Mid the Paynim in Palestine.
But the wife that he loved, when she poured him up
A last deep health in her golden cup,
Put poison into the wine.

"So he rode till the land he loved grew dim,
And that poison began to work in him, —
A true knight chanting his Christian hymn,
With the cross on his gallant crest.
Eastward, aye, from the waning west,
Toward the land where the bones of the Saviour rest,
And the Battle of God is to win:
With his young wife's picture upon his breast,
And her poisoned wine within.

"Alas! poor knight, poor knight!
He carries the foe he cannot fight
In his own true breast shut up.

He shall die or ever he fight for the Lord,
And his heart be broken before his sword.
He hath pledged his life
To a faithless wife,
In the wine of a poisoned cup!"

Comrade, thy hand in mine!
Pledge me in our last wine,
While all is dark on the brine.
My friend, I reck not now
If the wild night-wind should blow
Our bark beyond the poles:—
To drift through fire or snow,
Out of reach of all we know—
Cold heart, and narrow brow,
Smooth faces, sordid souls!
Lost, like some pale crew
From Ophir, in golden galleys,
On a witch's island! who
Wander the tamarisk alleys,
Where the heaven is blue,
And the ocean too,
That murmurs among the valleys.

"Perisht with all on board!"
So runs the vagrant fame—
Thy wife weds another lord,
My children forget my name,
While we count new stars by night.
Each wanders out of sight
Till the beard on his chin grows white
And scant grow the curls on his head.
One paces the placid hours
In dim enchanted bowers,
By a soft-eyed Panther led
To a magical milk-white bed
Of deep, pale poison-flowers.
With ruined gods one dwells,
In caverns among the fells,
Where, with desolate arms outspread,
A single tree stands dead,
Smitten by savage spells,
And striking a silent dread
From its black and blighted head
Through the horrible, hopeless, sultry dells
Of Elephanta, the Red.

BOOK II.—IN FRANCE.

"PRENSUS IN ÆGÆO."

'T is toil must help us to forget.
In strife, they say, grief finds repose.
Well, there 's the game! I throw the stakes:—
A life of war, a world of foes,
A heart that triumphs while it breaks.
Some day I too, perchance, may lose
This shade which memory o'er me throws,
And laugh as others laugh, (who knows?)
But ah, 't will not be yet!

How many years since she and I
Walked that old terrace, hand-in-hand!
Just one star in the rosy sky,
And silence on the summer land.
And she? . . .
I think I hear her sing
That song,—the last of all our songs.
How all comes back!—thing after thing,
The old life o'er me throngs!

But I must to the palace go;
The ambassador's to-morrow:
Here 's little time for thought, I know,
And little more for sorrow.
Already in the *porte-cochère*
The carriage sounds . . . my hat and gloves!
I hear my friend's foot on the stair,—
How joyously it moves!
He must have done some wicked thing
To make him tread so light:
Or is it only that the king
Admired his wife last night?
We talk of nations by the way,
And praise the Nuncio's manners,
And end with something fine to say
About the "allied banners."
'T is well to mix with all conditions
Of men in every station:
I sup to-morrow with musicians,
Upon the invitation
Of my clever friend, the journalist,
Who writes the reading plays
Which no one reads; a socialist
Most social in his ways.

But I am sick of all the din
That 's made in praising Verdi,
Who only know a violin
Is not a hurdy-gurdy.

Here oft, while on a nerveless hand
An aching brow reclining,
Through this tall window where I stand,
I see the great town shining.
Hard by, the restless Boulevart roars,
Heard all the night through, even in dreaming :
While from its hundred open doors
The many-headed Life is streaming.
Upon the world's wide thoroughfares
My lot is cast. So be it !
Each on his back his burthen bears,
And feels, though he may not see it.
My life is not more hard than theirs
Who toil on either side :
They cry for quiet in their prayers,
And it is still denied.

But sometimes, when I stand alone,
Life pauses, — now and then :
And in the distance dies the moan
Of miserable men.
As in a dream (how strange !) I seem
To be lapsing, slowly, slowly,
From noise and strife, to a stiller life,
Where all is husht and holy.

Ah, love ! our way 's in a stranger land.
We may not rest together.
For an Angel takes me by the hand,
And leads me . . . whither ? whither ?

À L'ENTRESOL.

One circle of all its golden hours
The flitting hand of the Time-piece there,
In its close white bower of china flowers,
Hath rounded unaware :

While the firelight, flung from the flickering wall
On the large and limpid mirror behind,
Hath reddened and darkened down o'er all,
As the fire itself declined.

Something of pleasure and something of pain
There lived in that sinking light.
What is it ?

Faces I never shall look at again,
In places you never will visit,

Revealed themselves in each faltering ember,
While, under a palely wavering flame,
Half of the years life aches to remember
Reappeared, and died as they came.

To its dark Forever an hour hath gone
Since either you or I have spoken :
Each of us might have been sitting alone
In a silence so unbroken.

I never shall know what made me look up
(In this cushioned chair so soft and deep,
By the table where, over the empty cup,
I was leaning, half asleep)

To catch a gleam on the picture up there
Of the saint in the wilderness under the oak ;
And a light on the brow of the bronze Voltaire,
Like the ghost of a cynical joke.

To mark, in each violet velvet fold
Of the curtains that fall 'twixt room and room,
The dip and dance of the manifold
Shadows of rosy gloom.

O'er the Rembrandt there — the Caracci here —
Flutter warmly the ruddy and wavering hues ;
And St. Anthony over his book has a leer
At the little French beauty by Greuze.

There, — the Leda, weighed over her white swan's back,
By the weight of her passionate kiss, ere it falls ;
O'er the ebony cabinet, glittering black
Through its ivory cups and balls :

Your scissors and thimble, and work laid away,
With its silks, in the scented rosewood box ;
The journals, that tell truth every day,
And that novel of Paul de Kock's :

The flowers in the vase, with their bells shut close
In a dream of the far green fields where they grew;
The cards of the visiting people and shows
In that bowl with the sea-green hue.

Your shawl, with a queenly droop of its own,
Hanging over the arm of the crimson chair:
And, last, — yourself, as silent as stone,
In a glow of the firelight there!

I thought you were reading all this time.
And was it some wonderful page of your book
Telling of love, with its glory and crime,
That has left you that sorrowful look?

For a tear from those dark, deep, humid orbs
'Neath their lashes, so long, and soft, and sleek,
All the light in your lustrous eyes absorbs,
As it trembles over your cheek.

Were you thinking how we, sitting side by side,
Might be dreaming miles and miles apart?
Or if lips could meet over a gulf so wide
As separates heart from heart?

Ah, well! when time is flown, how it fled
It is better neither to ask nor tell.
Leave the dead moments to bury their dead.
Let us kiss and break the spell!

Come, arm in arm, to the window here;
Draw by the thick curtain, and see how, to-night,
In the clear and frosty atmosphere,
The lamps are burning bright.

All night, and forever, in yon great town,
The heaving Boulevart flares and roars;
And the streaming Life flows up and down
From its hundred open doors.

It is scarcely so cold, but I and you,
With never a friend to find us out,
May stare at the shops for a moment or two,
And wander awhile about.

For when in the crowd we have taken our place,
(— Just two more lives to the mighty street there!)
Knowing no single form or face
Of the men and women we meet there, —

Knowing, and known of, none in the whole
Of that crowd all round, but our two selves only,
We shall grow nearer, soul to soul,
Until we feel less lonely.

Here are your bonnet and gloves, dear. There, —
How stately you look in that long rich shawl!
Put back your beautiful golden hair,
That never a curl may fall.

Stand in the firelight . . . so, . . . as you were, —
O my heart, how fearfully like her she seemed!
Hide me up from my own despair,
And the ghost of a dream I dreamed!

TERRA INCOGNITA.

How sweet it is to sit beside her,
When the hour brings nought that's better!
All day in my thoughts to hide her,
And, with fancies free from fetter,
Half remember, half forget her.
Just to find her out by times
In my mind, among sweet fancies
Laid away:
In the fall of mournful rhymes;
In a dream of distant climes;
In the sights a lonely man sees
At the dropping of the day;
Grave or gay.
As a maiden sometimes locks
With old letters, whose contents
Tears have faded,
In an old worm-eaten box,
Some sweet packet of faint scents,
Silken-braided;
And forgets it:

Careless, so I hide
In my life her love, —
Fancies on each side,
Memories heaped above : —
There it lies, unspied :
Nothing frets it.
On a sudden, when
Deed, or word, or glance,
Brings me back again
To the old romance,
With what rapture then, —
When, in its completeness,
Once my heart hath found it,
By each sense detected,
Steals on me the sweetness
Of the air around it,
Where it lies neglected !
Shall I break the charm of this
In a single minute ?
For some chance with fuller bliss
Proffered in it ?
Secrets unsealed by a kiss,
Could I win it !
'T is so sweet to linger near her,
Idly so !
Never reckoning, while I hear her
Whispering low,
If each whisper will make clearer
Bliss or woe ;
Never roused to hope or fear her
Yes or No !
What if, seeking something more
Than before,
All that 's given I displace —
Calm and grace —
Nothing ever can restore,
As of yore,
That old quiet face !
Quiet skies in quiet lakes,
No wind wakes,
All their beauty double :
But a single pebble breaks
Lake and sky to trouble ;
Then dissolves the foam it makes
In a bubble.
With the pebble in my hand,
Here, upon the brink, I stand ;
Meanwhile, standing on the brink,
Let me think !
Not for her sake, but for mine,
Let those eyes unquestioned shine,
Half divine :
Let no hand disturb the rare
Smoothness of that lustrous hair
Anywhere :
Let that white breast never break
Its calm motion — sleep or wake —
For my sake.
Not for her sake, but for mine,
All I might have, I resign.
Should I glow
To the hue — the fragrance fine —
The mere first sight of the wine,
If I drained the goblet low ?
Who can know ?
With her beauty like the snow,
Let her go ! Shall I repine
That no idle breath of mine
Melts it ? No ! 'T is better so.
All the same, as she came,
With her beauty like the snow,
Cold, unspotted, let her go !

A REMEMBRANCE.

'T was eve and May when last, through tears,
Thine eyes sought mine, thy hand my hand.
The night came down her silent spheres,
And up the silent land.

In silence, too, my thoughts were furled,
Like ring-doves in the dreaming grove.
Who would not lightly lose the world
To keep such love ?

But many Mays, with all their flowers,
Are faded since that blissful time —
The last of all my happy hours
I' the golden clime !

By hands not thine these wreaths were curled
That hide the care my brows above :
And I have almost gained the world,
But lost that love.

As though for some serene dead brow,
These wreaths for me I let them twine.
I hear the voice of praise, and know
It is not thine.

How many long and lonely days
I strove with life thy love to gain !
I know my work was worth thy praise ;
But all was vain.

Vain Passion's fire, vain Music's art !
For who from thorns grape-bunches gathers ?
What depth is in the shallow heart ?
What weight in feathers ?

As drops the blossom, ere the growth
Of fruit, on some autumnal tree,
I drop from my changed life, its youth
And joy in thee:

And look beyond, and o'er thee, — right
To some sublimer end than lies
Within the compass of the sight
Of thy cold eyes.

With thine my soul hath ceased its strife.
Thy part is filled; thy work is done;
Thy falsehood buried in my life,
And known to none.

Yet still will golden memories frame
Thy broken image in my heart,
And love for what thou wast shut blame
From what thou art.

In Life's long galleries, haunting-eyed,
Thy pictured face no change shall show;
Like some dead Queen's who lived and died
An age ago!

MADAME LA MARQUISE.

THE folds of her wine-dark violet dress
Glow over the sofa, fall on fall,
As she sits in the air of her loveliness
With a smile for each and for all.

Half of her exquisite face in the shade
Which o'er it the screen in her soft hand flings:
Through the gloom glows her hair in its odorous braid:
In the firelight are sparkling her rings.

As she leans, — the slow smile half shut up in her eyes
Beams the sleepy, long, silk-soft lashes beneath;
Through her crimson lips, stirred by her faint replies,
Breaks one gleam of her pearl-white teeth.

As she leans, — where your eye, by her beauty subdued,
Droops — from under warm fringes of broidery white
The slightest of feet — silken-slippered, protrude,
For one moment, then slip out of sight.

As I bend o'er her bosom, to tell her the news,
The faint scent of her hair, the approach of her cheek,
The vague warmth of her breath, all my senses suffuse
With HERSELF: and I tremble to speak.

So she sits in the curtained, luxurious light
Of that room, with its porcelain, and pictures, and flowers,
When the dark day 's half done, and the snow flutters white,
Past the windows in feathery showers.

All without is so cold, — 'neath the low leaden sky!
Down the bald, empty street, like a ghost, the gendarme
Stalks surly: a distant carriage hums by: —
All within is so bright and so warm!

Here we talk of the schemes and the scandals of court,
How the courtesan pushes: the charlatan thrives:
We put horns on the heads of our friends, just for sport:
Put intrigues in the heads of their wives.

Her warm hand, at parting, so strangely thrilled mine,
That at dinner I scarcely remark what they say, —
Drop the ice in my soup, spill the salt in my wine,
Then go yawn at my favorite play.

But she drives after noon: — then 's the time to behold her,
With her fair face half hid, like a ripe peeping rose,
'Neath that veil, — o'er the velvets and furs which enfold her,
Leaning back with a queenly repose, —

As she glides up the sunlight! . . . You 'd say she was made
To loll back in a carriage, all day, with a smile,
And at dusk, on a sofa, to lean in the shade
Of soft lamps, and be wooed for a while.

Could we find out her heart through
that velvet and lace!
Can it beat without ruffling her sump-
tuous dress?
She will show us her shoulder, her
bosom, her face;
But what the heart's like, we must
guess.

With live women and men to be found
in the world —
(— Live with sorrow and sin, — live
with pain and with passion, —)
Who could live with a doll, though its
locks should be curled,
And its petticoats trimmed in the
fashion?

'T is so fair! . . . would my bite, if I
bit it, draw blood?
Will it cry if I hurt it? or scold if I kiss?
Is it made, with its beauty, of wax or
of wood?
. . . Is it worth while to guess at all this?

THE NOVEL.

"Here, I have a book at last —
Sure," I thought, "to make you weep!"
But a careless glance you cast
O'er its pages, half asleep.

'T is a novel, — a romance,
(What you will) of youth, of home,
And of brilliant days in France,
And long moonlit nights in Rome.

'T is a tale of tears and sins,
Of love's glory and its gloom;
In a ball-room it begins,
And it ends beside a tomb;

There 's a little heroine too,
Whom each chapter leaves more pale;
And her eyes are dark and blue
Like the violet of the vale;

And her hand is frail and fair;
Could you but have seen it lie
O'er the convent death-bed, where
Wept the nuns to watch her die,

You, I think, had wept as well;
For the patience in her face
(Where the dying sunbeam fell)
Had such strange heart-breaking grace.

There 's a lover, eager, bold,
Knocking at the convent gate:
But that little hand grows cold,
And the lover knocks too late.

There 's a high-born lady stands
At a golden mirror, pale;
Something makes her jewelled hands
Tremble, as she hears the tale

Which her maid (while weaving roses
For the ball, through her dark hair)
Mixed with other news, discloses.
O, to-night she will look fair!

There 's an old man, feeble-handed,
Counting gold . . . "My son shall wed
With the Princess, as I planned it,
Now that little girl is dead."

There 's a young man, sullen, husht,
By remorse and grief unmanned,
With a withered primrose crusht
In his hot and feverish hand.

There's a broken-hearted woman,
Haggard, desolate, and wild,
Says . . . "The world hath grown in-
human!
Bury me beside my child."

And the little god of this world
Hears them, laughing in his sleeve.
He is master still in his world,
There 's another, we believe.

Of this history every part
You have seen, yet did not heed it;
For 't is written in my heart,
And you have not learned to read it.

AUX ITALIENS.

At Paris it was, at the Opera there; —
And she looked like a queen in a book,
that night,
With the wreath of pearl in her raven
hair,
And the brooch on her breast, so
bright.

Of all the operas that Verdi wrote,
The best, to my taste, is the Trovatore:
And Mario can soothe with a tenor note
The souls in Purgatory.

The moon on the tower slept soft as snow :
And who was not thrilled in the strangest way,
As we heard him sing, while the gas burned low,
"*Non ti scordar di me*" ?

The Emperor there, in his box of state,
Looked grave, as if he had just then seen
The red flag wave from the city-gate,
Where his eagles in bronze had been.

The Empress, too, had a tear in her eye.
You 'd have said that her fancy had gone back again,
For one moment, under the old blue sky,
To the old glad life in Spain.

Well ! there in our front-row box we sat,
Together, my bride-betrothed and I ;
My gaze was fixed on my opera-hat,
And hers on the stage hard by.

And both were silent, and both were sad.
Like a queen, she leaned on her full white arm,
With that regal, indolent air she had ;
So confident of her charm !

I have not a doubt she was thinking then
Of her former lord, good soul that he was !
Who died the richest and roundest of men,
The Marquis of Carabas.

I hope that, to get to the kingdom of heaven,
Through a needle's eye he had not to pass.
I wish him well, for the jointure given
To my lady of Carabas.

Meanwhile, I was thinking of my first love,
As I had not been thinking of aught for years,
Till over my eyes there began to move
Something that felt like tears.

I thought of the dress that she wore last time,
When we stood, 'neath the cypress-trees, together,
In that lost land, in that soft clime,
In the crimson evening weather :
Of that muslin dress (for the eve was hot),
And her warm white neck in its golden chain
And her full, soft hair, just tied in a knot,
And falling loose again :

And the jasmin-flower in her fair young breast :
(O the faint, sweet smell of that jasmin-flower !)
And the one bird singing alone to his nest :
And the one star over the tower.

I thought of our little quarrels and strife ;
And the letter that brought me back my ring.
And it all seemed then, in the waste of life,
Such a very little thing !

For I thought of her grave below the hill,
Which the sentinel cypress-tree stands over.
And I thought . . . "were she only living still,
How I could forgive her, and love her ! "

And I swear, as I thought of her thus, in that hour,
And of how, after all, old things were best,
That I smelt the smell of that jasmin-flower,
Which she used to wear in her breast.

It smelt so faint, and it smelt so sweet,
It made me creep, and it made me cold !
Like the scent that steals from the crumbling sheet
Where a mummy is half unrolled.

And I turned, and looked. She was sitting there
In a dim box, over the stage ; and drest
In that muslin dress, with that full soft hair,
And that jasmin in her breast !

I was here : and she was there :
And the glittering horseshoe curved between : —
From my bride-betrothed, with her raven hair,
And her sumptuous, scornful mien.

To my early love, with her eyes downcast,
And over her primrose face the shade,
(In short from the Future back to the Past)
There was but a step to be made.

To my early love from my future bride
One moment I looked. Then I stole to the door,
I traversed the passage; and down at her side,
I was sitting, a moment more.

My thinking of her, or the music's strain,
Or something which never will be exprest,
Had brought her back from the grave again,
With the jasmin in her breast.

She is not dead, and she is not wed!
But she loves me now, and she loved me then!
And the very first word that her sweet lips said,
My heart grew youthful again.

The Marchioness there, of Carabas,
She is wealthy, and young, and handsome still,
And but for her . . . well, we 'll let that pass,
She may marry whomever she will.

But I will marry my own first love,
With her primrose face: for old things are best,
And the flower in her bosom, I prize it above
The brooch in my lady's breast.

The world is filled with folly and sin,
And Love must cling where it can, I say:
For Beauty is easy enough to win;
But one is n't loved every day.

And I think, in the lives of most women and men,
There 's a moment when all would go smooth and even,
If only the dead could find out when
To come back, and be forgiven.

But O the smell of that jasmin-flower!
And O that music! and O the way
That voice rang out from the donjon tower
Non ti scordar di me,
Non ti scordar di me!

PROGRESS.

When Liberty lives loud on every lip,
But Freedom moans,
Trampled by Nations whose faint footfalls slip
Round bloody thrones;
When, here and there, in dungeon and in thrall,
Or exile pale,
Like torches dying at a funeral,
Brave natures fail;
When Truth, the armed archangel, stretches wide
God's tromp in vain,
And the world, drowsing, turns upon its side
To drowse again;
O Man, whose course hath called itself sublime
Since it began,
What art thou in such dying age of time,
As man to man?

When Love's last wrong hath been forgotten coldly,
As First Love's face:
And, like a rat that comes to wanton boldly
In some lone place,
Once festal, — in the realm of light and laughter
Grim Doubt appears;
Whilst weird suggestions from Death's vague Hereafter,
O'er ruined years,
Creep, dark and darker, with new dread to mutter
Through Life's long shade,
Yet make no more in the chill breast the flutter
Which once they made:
Whether it be, — that all doth at the grave
Round to its term,
That nothing lives in that last darkness, save
The little worm,
Or whether the tired spirit prolong its course
Through realms unseen, —
Secure, that unknown world cannot be worse
Than this hath been;
Then when through Thought's gold chain, so frail and slender,
No link will meet;

When all the broken harps of Language render
No sound that 's sweet;
When, like torn books, sad days weigh down each other
I' the dusty shelf;
O Man, what art thou, O my friend, my brother,
Even to thyself?

THE PORTRAIT.

Midnight past! Not a sound of aught
Through the silent house, but the wind at his prayers.
I sat by the dying fire, and thought
Of the dear dead woman up stairs.

A night of tears! for the gusty rain
Had ceased, but the eaves were dripping yet;
And the moon looked forth, as though in pain,
With her face all white and wet:

Nobody with me, my watch to keep,
But the friend of my bosom, the man I love:
And grief had sent him fast to sleep
In the chamber up above.

Nobody else, in the country place
All round, that knew of my loss beside,
But the good young Priest with the Raphael-face,
Who confessed her when she died.

That good young Priest is of gentle nerve,
And my grief had moved him beyond control;
For his lip grew white, as I could observe,
When he speeded her parting soul.

I sat by the dreary hearth alone:
I thought of the pleasant days of yore:
I said "the staff of my life is gone:
The woman I loved is no more.

"On her cold, dead bosom my portrait lies,
Which next to her heart she used to wear —
Haunting it o'er with her tender eyes
When my own face was not there.

"It is set all round with rubies red,
And pearls which a Peri might have kept.
For each ruby there, my heart hath bled:
For each pearl, my eyes have wept."

And I said — "the thing is precious to me:
They will bury her soon in the churchyard clay;
It lies on her heart, and lost must be,
If I do not take it away."

I lighted my lamp at the dying flame,
And crept up the stairs that creaked for fright,
Till into the chamber of death I came,
Where she lay all in white.

The moon shone over her winding-sheet.
There, stark she lay on her carven bed:
Seven burning tapers about her feet,
And seven about her head.

As I stretched my hand, I held my breath;
I turned as I drew the curtains apart;
I dared not look on the face of death:
I knew where to find her heart,

I thought, at first, as my touch fell there,
It had warmed that heart to life, with love;
For the thing I touched was warm, I swear,
And I could feel it move.

'T was the hand of a man, that was moving slow
O'er the heart of the dead, — from the other side;
And at once the sweat broke over my brow,
"Who is robbing the corpse?" I cried.

Opposite me, by the tapers' light,
The friend of my bosom, the man I loved,
Stood over the corpse, and all as white,
And neither of us moved.

"What do you here, my friend?" . . .
The man
Looked first at me, and then at the dead.
"There is a portrait here," he began;
"There is. It is mine," I said.

Said the friend of my bosom, "yours, no doubt,
The portrait was, till a month ago,
When this suffering angel took that out,
And placed mine there, I know."

"This woman, she loved me well," said I.
"A month ago," said my friend to me;
"And in your throat," I groaned, "you lie!"
He answered . . . "let us see."

"Enough!" I returned, "let the dead decide:
And whose soever the portrait prove,
His shall it be, when the cause is tried,
Where Death is arraigned by Love."

We found the portrait there, in its place:
We opened it, by the tapers' shine:
The gems were all unchanged: the face
Was — neither his nor mine.

"One nail drives out another, at least!
The face of the portrait there," I cried,
"Is our friend's, the Raphael-faced young Priest,
Who confessed her when she died."

The setting is all of rubies red,
And pearls which a Peri might have kept.
For each ruby there my heart hath bled:
For each pearl my eyes have wept.

ASTARTE.

When the latest strife is lost, and all is done with,
Ere we slumber in the spirit and the brain,
We drowse back, in dreams, to days that life begun with,
And their tender light returns to us again.

I have cast away the tangle and the torment
Of the cords that bound my life up in a mesh:
And the pulse begins to throb that long lay dormant
'Neath their pressure; and the old wounds bleed afresh.

I am touched again with shades of early sadness,
Like the summer-cloud's light shadow in my hair:
I am thrilled again with breaths of boyish gladness,
Like the scent of some last primrose on the air.

And again she comes, with all her silent graces,
The lost woman of my youth, yet unpossest:
And her cold face so unlike the other faces
Of the women whose dead lips I since have prest.

The motion and the fragrance of her garments
Seem about me, all the day long, in the room:
And her face, with its bewildering old endearments
Comes at night, between the curtains, in the gloom.

When vain dreams are stirred with sighing, near the morning,
To my own her phantom lips I feel approach:
And her smile, at eve, breaks o'er me without warning
From its speechless, pale, perpetual reproach.

When Life's dawning glimmer yet had all the tint there
Of the orient, in the freshness of the grass,
(Ah, what feet since then have trodden out the print there!)
Did her soft, her silent footsteps fall, and pass.

They fell lightly, as the dew falls, 'mid ungathered
Meadow-flowers; and lightly lingered with the dew.
But the dew is gone, the grass is dried and withered,
And the traces of those steps have faded too.

Other footsteps fall about me, — faint, uncertain,
In the shadow of the world, as it recedes:

Other forms peer through the half-uplifted curtain
Of that mystery which hangs behind the creeds.

What is gone, is gone forever. And new fashions
May replace old forms which nothing can restore:
But I turn from sighing back departed passions
With that pining at the bosom as of yore.

I remember to have murmured, morn and even,
"Though the Earth dispart these Earthlies, face from face,
Yet the Heavenlies shall surely join in Heaven,
For the spirit hath no bonds in time or space.

"Where it listeth, there it bloweth; all existence
Is its region; and it houseth, where it will.
I shall feel her through immeasurable distance,
And grow nearer and be gathered to her still.

"If I fail to find her out by her gold tresses,
Brows, and breast, and lips, and language of sweet strains,
I shall know her by the traces of dead kisses,
And that portion of myself which she retains."

But my being is confused with new experience,
And changed to something other than it was;
And the Future with the Past is set at variance;
And Life falters with the burthens which it has.

Earth's old sins press fast behind me, weakly wailing:
Faint before me fleets the good I have not done:
And my search for her may still be unavailing
'Mid the spirits that are passed beyond the sun.

AT HOME DURING THE BALL.

'T is hard upon the dawn, and yet
She comes not from the Ball.
The night is cold, and bleak, and wet,
And the snow lies over all.

I praised her with her diamonds on: —
And, as she went, she smiled.
And yet I sighed, when she was gone,
Above our sleeping child.

And all night long, as soft and slow
As falls the falling rain,
The thoughts of days gone long ago
Have filled my heart again.

Once more I hear the Rhine rush down,
(I hear it in my mind!)
Once more, about the sleeping town,
The lamps wink in the wind.

The narrow, silent street I pass:
The house stands o'er the river:
A light is at the casement-glass,
That leads my soul forever.

I feel my way along the gloom,
Stair after stair, I push the door:
I find no change within the room,
And all things as of yore.

One little room was all we had
For June and for December.
The world is wide, but O how sad
It seems, when I remember!

The cage with the canary-bird
Hangs in the window still:
The small red rose-tree is not stirred
Upon the window-sill.

Wide open her piano stands;
— That song I made to ease
A passing pain while her soft hands
Went faintly o'er the keys!

The fire within the stove burns down;
The light is dying fast.
How dear is all it shines upon,
That firelight of the Past!

No sound! the drowsy Dutch-clock ticks:
O, how should I forget
The slender ebon crucifix,
That by her bed is set?

Her little bed is white as snow, —
How dear that little bed !
Sweet dreams about the curtains go,
And whisper round her head.

That gentle head sleeps o'er her arm
— Sleeps all its soft brown hair :
And those dear clothes of hers, yet warm,
Droop open on the chair.

Yet warm the snowy petticoat !
The dainty corset too !
How warm the ribbon from her throat,
And warm each little shoe !

Lie soft, dear arm upon the pillow !
Sleep, foolish little head !
Ah, well she sleeps ! I know the willow
That curtains her cold bed. —

Since last I trod that silent street
'T is many a year ago :
And, if I there could set my feet
Once more, I do not know

If I should find it where it was,
That house upon the river :
But the light that lit the casement-glass
I know is dark forever.

Hark ! wheels below, . . . my lady's knock !
— Farewell, the old romance ! —
Well, dear, you 're late, — past four o'clock ! —
How often did you dance ?

Not cooler from the crowning waltz,
She takes my half the pillow. —
Well, — well ! — the women free from faults
Have beds below the willow !

AT HOME AFTER THE BALL.

The clocks are calling Three
Across the silent floors.
The fire in the library
Dies out ; through the open doors
The red empty room you may see.

In the nursery, up stairs,
The child had gone to sleep,
Half-way 'twixt dreams and prayers,
When the hall-door made him leap
To its thunders unawares.

Like love in a worldly breast,
Alone in my lady's chamber,
The lamp burns low, supprest
'Mid satins of broidered amber,
Where she stands, half undrest :

Her bosom all unlaced :
Her cheeks with a bright red spot :
Her long dark hair displaced,
Down streaming, heeded not,
From her white throat to her waist :

She stands up her full height,
With her ball-dress slipping down her,
And her eyes as fixed and bright
As the diamond stars that crown her, —
An awful, beautiful sight.

Beautiful, yes . . . with her hair
So wild, and her cheeks so flusht !
Awful, yes . . . for there
In her beauty she stands husht
By the pomp of her own despair !

And fixt there, without doubt,
Face to face with her own sorrow,
She will stand, till, from without,
The light of the neighboring morrow
Creeps in, and finds her out.

With last night's music pealing
Youth's dirges in her ears :
With last night's lamps revealing,
In the charnels of old years,
The face of each dead feeling.

Ay, Madam, here alone
You may think, till your heart is broken,
Of the love that is dead and done,
Of the days that, with no token,
Forevermore are gone. —

Weep if you can, beseech you !
There 's no one by to curb you :
Your child's cry cannot reach you :
Your lord will not disturb you :
Weep ! . . . what can weeping teach you ?

Your tears are dead in you.
"What harm, where all things change,"
You say, "if we change too ?
— The old still sunny Grange !
Ah, that 's far off i' the dew.

"Were those not pleasant hours,
Ere I was what I am ?

My garden of fresh flowers !
My milk-white weanling lamb !
My bright laburnum bowers !

"The orchard walls so trim !
The redbreast in the thorn !
The twilight soft and dim !
The child's heart ! eve and morn,
So rich with thoughts of *him !*"

Hush ! your weanling lamb is dead :
Your garden trodden over.
They have broken the farm shed :
They have buried your first lover
With the grass above his head.

Has the Past, then, so much power,
You dare take not from the shelf
That book with the dry flower,
Lest it make you hang yourself
For being yourself for an hour ?

Why can't you let thought be
For even a little while ?
There 's nought in memory
Can bring you back the smile
Those lips have lost. Just see,

Here what a costly gem
To-night in your hair you wore —
Pearls on a diamond stem !
When sweet things are no more,
Better not think of them.

Are you saved by pangs that pained you,
Is there comfort in all it cost you,
Before the world had gained you,
Before that God had lost you,
Or your soul had quite disdained you ?

For your soul (and this is worst
To bear, as you well know)
Has been watching you, from first,
As sadly as God could do ;
And yourself yourself have curst.

Talk of the flames of Hell !
We fuel ourselves, I conceive,
The fire the Fiend lights. Well,
Believe or disbelieve,
We know more than we tell !

Surely you need repose !
To-morrow again — the Ball.
And you must revive the rose
In your cheek, to bloom for all.
Not go ? . . . why the whole world goes.

To bed ! to bed ! 'T is sad
To find that Fancy's wings
Have lost the hues they had.
In thinking of these things
Some women have gone mad.

AU CAFÉ * * *.

A PARTY of friends, all light-hearted and gay,
At a certain French café, where every one goes,
Are met, in a well-curtained warm *cabinet*,
Overlooking a street there, which every one knows.

The guests are, three ladies well known and admired :
One adorns the *Lyrique ;* one . . . I oft have beheld her
At the *Vaudeville*, with raptures ; the third lives retired
"*Dans ses meubles*" . . . (we all know her house) . . . Rue de Helder.

Besides these is a fourth . . . a young Englishman, lately
Presented the round of the clubs in the town.
A taciturn Anglican coldness sedately
Invests him : unthawed by Clarisse, he sits down.

But little he speaks, and but rarely he shares
In the laughter around him ; his smiles are but few ;
There 's a sneer in the look that his countenance wears
In repose ; and fatigue in the eyes' weary blue.

The rest are three Frenchmen. Three Frenchmen (thank heaven !)
Are but rarely morose, with Champagne and Bordeaux :
And their wit, and their laughter, suffices to leaven
With mirth their mute guest's imitation of snow.

The dinner is done : the Lafitte in its basket,
The Champagne in its cooler, is passed in gay haste ;

Whatever you wish for, you have but to ask it :
Here are coffee, cigars, and liqueurs to your taste.

And forth from the bottles the corks fly ; and chilly,
The bright wine, in bubbling and blushing, confounds
Its warmth with the ice that it seethes round ; and shrilly
(Till stifled by kisses) the laughter resounds.

Strike, strike the piano, beat loud at the wall !
Let wealthy old Lycus with jealousy groan
Next door, while fair Chloris responds to the call,
Too fair to be supping with Lycus alone ! *

Clarisse, with a smile, has subsided, opprest, —
Half, perhaps, by Champagne . . . half, perhaps, by affection, —
In the arms of the taciturn, cold, English guest,
With, just rising athwart her imperial complexion,

One tinge that young Evian himself might have kist
From the fairest of Mænads that danced in his troop ;
And her deep hair, unloosed from its sumptuous twist,
Overshowering her throat and her bosom a-droop.

The soft snowy throat, and the round, dimpled chin,
Upturned from the arm-fold where hangs the rich head !
And the warm lips apart, while the white lids begin
To close over the dark languid eyes which they shade !

And next to Clarisse (with her wild hair all wet
From the wine, in whose blush its faint fire-fly gold

* "Audeat invidus
Dementem strepitum Lycus
Et vicina seni non habilis Lyco."
HORACE.

She was steeping just now), the blue-eyed Juliette
Is murmuring her witty bad things to Arnold.

Cries Arnold to the dumb English guest . . . "*Mon ami,*
What 's the matter ? . . . you can't sing . . . well, speak, then, at least :
More grave, had a man seen a ghost, could he be ?
Mais quel drôle de farceur ! . . . comme il a le vin triste !"

And says Charles to Eugène (vainly seeking to borrow
Ideas from a yawn) . . . "At the club there are three of us
With the Duke, and we play lansquenet till to-morrow :
I am off on the spur . . . what say *you ?* . . . will you be of us ?"

"*Mon enfant, tu me boudes — tu me boudes, cheri,*"
Sighs the soft Celestine on the breast of Eugène ;
"*Ah bah ! ne me fais pas poser, mon amie,*"
Laughs her lover, and lifts to his lips — the Champagne.

And loud from the bottles the corks fly ; and chilly
The wine gurgles up to its fine crystal bounds.
While Charles rolls his paper cigars round, how shrilly
(Till kist out) the laughter of Juliette resounds !

Strike, strike the piano ! beat loud at the wall !
Let wealthy old Lycus with jealousy groan
Next door, while fair Chloris responds to the call,
Too fair to be supping with Lycus alone.

There is Celestine singing, and Eugène is swearing. —
In the midst of the laughter, the oaths, and the songs,
Falls a knock at the door ; but there 's nobody hearing :
Each, uninterrupted, the revel prolongs.

Said I . . . "nobody hearing?" one only; — the guest,
The morose English stranger, so dull to the charms
Of Clarisse, and Juliette, Celestine, and the rest;
Who sits, cold as a stone, with a girl in his arms.

Once, twice, and three times, he has heard it repeated;
And louder, and fiercer, each time the sound falls.
And his cheek is death pale, 'mid the others so heated;
There 's a step at the door, too, his fancy recalls.

And he rises . . . (just so an automaton rises, —
Some man of mechanics made up, — that must move
In the way that the wheel moves within him; — there lies his
Sole path fixt before him, below and above).

He rises . . . and, scarcely a glance casting on her,
Flings from him the beauty asleep on his shoulder;
Charles springs to his feet; Eugène mutters of honor;
But there 's that in the stranger that awes each beholder.

For the hue on his cheek, it is whiter than whiteness:
The hair creeps on his head like a strange living thing.
The lamp o'er the table has lost half its brightness;
Juliette cannot laugh; Celestine cannot sing.

He has opened the door in a silence unbroken:
And the gaze of all eyes where he stands is fixt wholly:
Not a hand is there raised; not a word is there spoken:
He has opened the door; . . . and there comes through it slowly

A woman, as pale as a dame on a tombstone,
With desolate violet eyes, open wide;
Her look, as she turns it, turns all in the room stone:
She sits down on the sofa, the stranger beside.

Her hair it is yellow, as moonlight on water
Which stones in some eddy torment into waves;
Her lips are as red as new blood spilt in slaughter;
Her cheek like a ghost's seen by night o'er the graves.

Her place by the taciturn guest she has taken;
And the glass at her side she has filled with Champagne.
As she bows o'er the board, all the revellers awaken.
She has pledged her mute friend, and she fills up again.

Clarisse has awaked; and with shrieks leaves the table.
Juliette wakes, and faints in the arms of Arnold.
And Charles and Eugène, with what speed they are able,
Are off to the club, where this tale shall be told.

Celestine for her brougham, on the stairs, was appealing,
With hysterical sobs, to the surly *concierge*,
When a ray through the doorway stole to her, revealing
A sight that soon changed her appeal to "*La vierge.*"

All the light-hearted friends from the chamber are fled:
And the café itself has grown silent by this.
From the dark street below, you can scarce hear a tread,
Save the Gendarme's, who reigns there as gloomy as Dis.

The shadow of night is beginning to flit:
Through the gray window shimmers the motionless town.
The ghost and the stranger, together they sit
Side by side at the table — the place is their own.

They nod and change glances, that pale
man and woman ;
For they both are well known to each
other : and then,
Some ghosts have a look that 's so hor-
ribly human,
In the street you might meet them,
and take them for men.

"Thou art changed, my beloved ! and
the lines have grown stronger,
And the curls have grown scanter,
that meet on thy brow.
Ah, faithless ! and dost thou remember
no longer
The hour of our passion, the words of
thy vow ?

"Thy kiss, on my lips it is burning for-
ever !
I cannot sleep calm, for my bed is so
cold.
Embrace me ! close . . . closer . . . O let
us part never,
And let all be again as it once was of
old ! "

So she murmurs repiningly ever. Her
breath
Lifts his hair like a night-wind in
winter. And he . . .
"Thy hand, O Irene, is icy as death,
But thy face is unchanged in its
beauty to me."

"'T is so cold, my beloved one, down
there, and so drear."
"Ah, thy sweet voice, Irene, sounds
hollow and strange ! "
"'T is the chills of the grave that have
changed it, I fear :
But the voice of my heart there 's no
chill that can change."

"Ha ! thy pale cheek is flusht with a
heat like my own.
Is it breath, is it flame, on thy lips
that is burning ?
Ha ! thy heart flutters wild, as of old,
'neath thy zone.
And those cold eyes of thine fill with
passionate yearning."

Thus, embracing each other, they bend
and they waver,
And, laughing and weeping, converse.
The pale ghost,
As the wine warms the grave-worm wit-
in her, grown braver,
Fills her glass to the brim, and pro-
poses a toast.

"Here 's a health to the glow-worm,
Death's sober lamplighter,
That saves from the darkness below
the gravestone
The tomb's pallid pictures . . . the sad-
der the brighter ;
Shapes of beauty each stony-eyed
corpse there hath known :

"Mere rough sketches of life, where a
glimpse goes for all,
Which the Master keeps (all the rest
let the world have !)
But though only rough-scrawled on
the blank charnel wall,
Is their truth the less sharp, that 't is
sheathed in the grave ?

"Here 's to Love . . . the prime passion
. . . the harp that we sung to
In the orient of youth, in the days
pure of pain ;
The cup that we quaffed in : the stirrup
we sprung to,
So light, ere the journey was made —
and in vain !

"O the life that we lived once ! the
beauty so fair once !
Let them go ! wherefore weep for what
tears could not save ?
What old trick sets us aping the fools
that we were once,
And tickles our brains even under the
grave ?

"There 's a small stinging worm which
the grave ever breeds
From the folds of the shroud that
around us is spread :
There 's a little blind maggot that revels
and feeds
On the life of the living, the sleep of
the dead.

"To our friends ! . . . " But the full
flood of dawn through the pane,
Having slowly rolled down the huge
street there unheard
(While the great, new, blue sky, o'er the
white Madeleine
Was wide opening itself), from her lip
washed the word ;

Washed her face faint and fainter; while, dimmer and dimmer,
In its seat, the pale form flickered out like a flame,
As broader, and brighter, and fuller, the glimmer
Of day through the heat-clouded window became.

And the day mounts apace. Some one opens the door.
In shuffles a waiter with sleepy red eyes:
He stares at the cushions flung loose on the floor,
On the bottles, the glasses, the plates, with surprise.

Stranger still! he sees seated a man at the table,
With his head on his hands: in a slumber he seems,
So wild, and so strange, he no longer is able
In silence to thrid through the path of his dreams.

For he moans, and he mutters: he moves and he motions:
To the dream that he dreams o'er his wine-cup he pledges.
And his sighs sound, through sleep, like spent winds over ocean's
Last verge, where the world hides its outermost edges.

The gas-lamp falls sick in the tube: and so, dying,
To the fumes of spilt wine, and cigars but half smoked,
Adds the stench of its last gasp: chairs broken are lying
All about o'er the carpet stained, littered, and soaked.

A touch starts the sleeper. He wakes. It is day.
And the beam that dispels all the phantoms of night
Through the rooms sends its kindly and comforting ray:
The streets are new-peopled: the morning is bright.

And the city's so fair! and the dawn breaks so brightly!
With gay flowers in the market, gay girls in the street.

Whate'er the strange beings that visit us nightly,
When Paris awakes, from her smile they retreat.

I myself have, at morning, beheld them departing;
Some in masks, and in dominos, footing it on;
Some like imps, some like fairies; at cockcrow all starting,
And speedily flitting from sight one by one.

And that wonderful night-flower, Memory, that, tearful,
Unbosoms to darkness her heart full of dew,
Folds her leaves round again, and from day shrinks up fearful
In the cleft of her ruin, the shade of her yew.

This broad daylight life's strange enough: and wherever
We wander, or walk; in the club, in the streets;
Not a straw on the ground is too trivial to sever
Each man in the crowd from the others he meets.

Each walks with a spy or a jailer behind him
(Some word he has spoken, some deed he has done);
And the step, now and then, quickens, just to remind him,
In the crowd, in the sun, that he is not alone.

But 't is hard, when by lamplight, 'mid laughter and songs too,
Those return, . . . we have buried, and mourned for, and prayed for,
And done with . . . and, free of the grave it belongs to,
Some ghost drinks your health in the wine you have paid for.

Wreathe the rose, O Young Man; pour the wine. What thou hast
That enjoy all the days of thy youth. Spare thou naught.
Yet beware! . . . at the board sits a ghost — 't is the Past;
In thy heart lurks a weird Necromancer — 't is Thought.

THE CHESS-BOARD.

My little love, do you remember,
Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
Those evenings in the bleak December,
Curtained warm from the snowy weather,
When you and I played chess together,
Checkmated by each other's eyes?
Ah, still I see your soft white hand
Hovering warm o'er Queen and Knight.
Brave Pawns in valiant battle stand.
The double Castles guard the wings:
The Bishop, bent on distant things,
Moves, sidling through the fight.
Our fingers touch; our glances meet,
And falter; falls your golden hair
Against my cheek; your bosom sweet
Is heaving. Down the field, your Queen
Rides slow her soldiery all between,
And checks me unaware.
Ah me! the little battle 's done,
Disperst is all its chivalry;
Full many a move, since then, have we
'Mid Life's perplexing checkers made,
And many a game with Fortune played, —
What is it we have won?
This, this at least — if this alone; —
That never, never, never more,
As in those old still nights of yore
(Ere we were grown so sadly wise),
Can you and I shut out the skies,
Shut out the world, and wintry weather,
And, eyes exchanging warmth with eyes,
Play chess, as then we played, together!

SONG.

If Sorrow have taught me anything,
She hath taught me to weep for you;
And if Falsehood have left me a tear to shed
For Truth, these tears are true.
If the one star left by the morning
Be dear to the dying night,
If the late lone rose of October
Be sweetest to scent and sight,
If the last of the leaves in December
Be dear to the desolate tree,
Remember, beloved, O remember
How dear is your beauty to me!

And more dear than the gold, is the silver
Grief hath sown in that hair's young gold:
And lovelier than youth is the language
Of the thoughts that have made youth old;
We must love, and unlove, and forget, dear —
Fashion and shatter the spell
Of how many a love in a life, dear —
Ere life learns to love once and love well.
Then what matters it, yesterday's sorrow?
Since I have outlived it — see!
And what matter the cares of to-morrow,
Since you, dear, will share them with me?

To love it is hard, and 't is harder
Perchance to be loved again:
But you 'll love me, I know, now I love you. —
What I seek I am patient to gain.
To the tears I have shed, and regret not,
What matter a few more tears?
Or a few days' waiting longer,
To one that has waited for years?
Hush! lay your head on my breast, there.
Not a word! . . . while I weep for your sake,
Sleep, and forget me, and rest there:
My heart will wait warm till you wake.
For — if Sorrow have taught me anything
She hath taught me to weep for you;
And if Falsehood have left me a tear to shed
For Truth, these tears are true!

THE LAST REMONSTRANCE.

Yes! I am worse than thou didst once believe me.
Worse than thou deem'st me now I cannot be —
But say "the Fiend 's no blacker," . . . canst thou leave me?
Where wilt thou flee?

Where wilt thou bear the relics of the days
Squandered round this dethronéd love of thine?
Hast thou the silver and the gold to raise
A new God's shrine?

Thy cheek hath lost its roundness and its bloom:
Who will forgive those signs where tears have fed

On thy once lustrous eyes, — save *he* for whom
Those tears were shed?

Know I not every grief whose course hath sown
Lines on thy brow, and silver in thy hair?
Will new love learn the language, mine alone
Hath graven there?

Despite the blemisht beauty of thy brow,
Thou wouldst be lovely, couldst thou love again;
For Love renews the Beautiful: but thou
Hast only pain.

How wilt thou bear from pity to implore
What once those eyes from rapture could command?
How wilt thou stretch — who wast a Queen of yore —
A suppliant's hand?

Even were thy heart content from love to ask
No more than needs to keep it from the chill,
Hast thou the strength to recommence the task
Of pardoning still?

Wilt thou to one, exacting all that I
Have lost the right to ask for, still extend
Forgiveness on forgiveness, with that sigh
That dreads the end?

Ah, if thy heart can pardon yet, why yet
Should not its latest pardon be for me?
For who will bend, the boon he seeks to get,
On lowlier knee?

Where wilt thou find the unworthier heart than mine,
That it may be more grateful, or more lowly?
To whom else, pardoning much, become divine
By pardoning wholly?

Hath not thy forehead paled beneath my kiss?
And through thy life have I not writ my name?
Hath not my soul signed thine? . . . I gave thee bliss,
If I gave shame:

The shame, but not the bliss, where'er thou goest,
Will haunt thee yet: to me no shame thou hast:
To me alone, what now thou art, thou knowest
By what thou wast.

What other hand will help thy heart to swell
To raptures mine first taught it how to feel?
Or from the unchorded harp and vacant shell
New notes reveal?

Ah, by my dark and sullen nature nurst,
And rocked by passion on this stormy heart,
Be mine the last, as thou wert mine the first!
We dare not part!

At best a fallen Angel to mankind,
To me be still the seraph I have dared
To show my hell to, and whose love resigned
Its pain hath shared.

If, faring on together, I have fed
Thy lips on poisons, they were sweet at least,
Nor couldst thou thrive where holier Love hath spread
His simpler feast.

Change would be death. Could severance from my side
Bring thee repose, I would not bid thee stay.
My love should meet, as calmly as my pride,
That parting day.

It may not be: for thou couldst not forget me, —
Not that my own is more than other natures,

But that 't is different: and thou wouldst
regret me
'Mid purer creatures.

Then, if love's first ideal now grows wan,
And thou wilt love again, — again
love me,
For what I am: — no hero, but a man
Still loving thee.

SORCERY.

TO ——.

You 're a milk-white Panther:
I 'm a Genius of the air.
You 're a Princess once enchanted;
That is why you seem so fair.

For a crime untold, unwritten,
That was done an age ago,
I have lost my wings, and wander
In the wilderness below.

In a dream too long indulged,
In a Palace by the sea,
You were changed to what you are
By a muttered sorcery.

Your name came on my lips
When I first looked in your eyes:
At my feet you fawned, you knew me
In despite of all disguise.

The black elephants of Delhi
Are the wisest of their kind,
And the libbards of Soumatra
Are full of eyes behind:

But they guessed not, they divined not,
They believed me of the earth,
When I walked among them, mourning
For the region of my birth.

Till I found you in the moonlight.
Then at once I knew it all.
You were sleeping in the sand here,
But you wakened to my call.

I knew why, in your slumber,
You were moaning piteously:
You heard a sound of harping
From a Palace by the sea.

Through the wilderness together
We must wander everywhere,
Till we find the magic berry
That shall make us what we were.

'T is a berry sweet and bitter,
I have heard; there is but one;
On a tall tree, by a fountain,
In the desert all alone.

When at last 't is found and eaten,
We shall both be what we were;
You, a Princess of the water,
I, a Genius of the air.

See! the Occident is flaring
Far behind us in the skies,
And our shadows float before us.
Night is coming forth. Arise!

ADIEU, MIGNONNE, MA BELLE.

Adieu, Mignonne, ma belle . . . when
you are gone,
Vague thoughts of you will wander,
searching love
Through this dim heart: through this
dim room, Mignonne,
Vague fragrance from your hair and
dress will move.

How will you think of this poor heart
to-morrow,
This poor fond heart with all its joy
in you?
Which you were fain to lean on, once,
in sorrow,
Though now you bid it such a light
adieu.

You 'll sing perchance . . . "I passed a
night of dreams
Once, in an old inn's old worm-eaten
bed,
Passing on life's highway. How strange
it seems,
That never more I there shall lean my
head!"

Adieu, Mignonne, adieu, Mignonne, ma
belle!
Ah, little witch, our greeting was so
gay,
Our love so painless, who 'd have thought
"Farewell"
Could ever be so sad a word to say?

I leave a thousand fond farewells with you :
Some for your red wet lips, which were so sweet :
Some for your darling eyes, so dear, so blue :
Some for your wicked, wanton little feet :

But for your little heart, not yet awake, —
What can I leave your little heart, Mignonne ?
It seems so fast asleep, I fear to break
The poor thing's slumber. Let it still sleep on !

TO MIGNONNE.

At morning, from the sunlight
I shall miss your sunny face,
Leaning, laughing, on my shoulder
With its careless infant grace ;
And your hand there,

With its rosy, inside color,
And the sparkle of its rings ;
And your soul from this old chamber
Missed in fifty little things,
When I stand there.

And the roses in the garden
Droop stupid all the day, —
Red, thirsty mouths wide open,
With not a word to say !
Their last meaning

Is all faded, like a fragrance,
From the languishing late flowers,
With your feet, your slow white movements,
And your face, in silent hours,
O'er them leaning.

And, in long, cool summer evenings,
I shall never see you, drest
In those pale violet colors
Which suit your sweet face best.
Here 's your glove, child,

Soiled and empty, as you left it,
Yet your hand's warmth seems to stay
In it still, as though this moment
You had drawn your hand away ;
Like your love, child,

Which still stays about my fancy.
See this little, silken boot. —
What a plaything ! was there ever
Such a slight and slender foot ?
Is it strange now

How that, when your lips are nearest
To the lips they feed upon
For a summer time, till bees sleep,
On a sudden you are gone ?
What new change now

Sets you sighing . . . eyes uplifted
To the starry night above ?
"God is great . . . the soul 's immortal . . .
Must we die, though ! . . . Do you love ?
One kiss more, then :

"Life might end now !" . . . And next moment
With those wicked little feet,
You have vanished, — like a Fairy
From a fountain in the heat,
And all 's o'er, then.

Well, no matter ! . . . hearts are breaking
Every day, but not for you,
Little wanton, ever making
Chains of rose, to break them through.
I would mourn you,

But your red smile was too warm, Sweet,
And your little heart too cold,
And your blue eyes too blue merely,
For a strong, sad man to scold,
Weep, or scorn, you.

For that smile's soft, transient sunshine
At my hearth, when it was chill,
I shall never do your name wrong,
But think kindly of you still ;
And each moment

Of your pretty infant angers,
(Who could help but smile at . . . when
Those small feet would stamp our love out ?)
Why, I pass them now, as then,
Without comment.

Only, here, when I am searching
For the book I cannot find,
I must sometimes pass your boudoir,
Howsoever disinclined ;
And must meet there

The gold bird-cage in the window,
Where no bird is singing now ;
The small sofa and the footstool,
Where I miss . . . I know not how . . .
Your young feet there,

Silken-soft in each quaint slipper ;
And the jewelled writing-case,
Where you never more will write now ;
And the vision of your face,
Just turned to me : —

I would save this, if I could, child,
But that 's all. . . . September 's here !
I must write a book : read twenty :
Learn a language . . . what 's to fear ?
Who grows gloomy

Being free to work, as I am ?
Yet these autumn nights are cold.
How I wonder how you 'll pass them !
Ah, . . . could all be as of old !
But 't is best so.

All good things must go for better,
As the primrose for the rose.
Is love free ? why so is life, too !
Holds the grave fast ? . . . I suppose
Things must rest so.

COMPENSATION.

When the days are silent all
Till the drear light falls ;
And the nights pass with the pall
Of Love's funerals ;
When the heart is weighed with years;
And the eyes too weak for tears ;
And life like death appears ;

Is it nought, O soul of mine,
To hear i' the windy track
A voice with a song divine
Calling thy footsteps back
To the land thou lovest best,
Toward the Garden in the West
Where thou hast once been blest ?

Is it nought, O aching brow,
To feel in the dark hour,
Which came, though called, so slow,
And, though loathed, yet lingers slower,
A hand upon thy pain,
Lovingly laid again,
Smoothing the ruffled brain ?

O love, my own and only !
The seraphs shall not see
By my looks that life was lonely ;
But that 't was blest by thee.
If few lives have been more lone,
Few have more rapture known,
Than mine and thine, my own !

When the lamp burns dim and dimmer ;
And the curtain close is drawn ;
And the twilight seems to glimmer
With a supernatural dawn ;
And the Genius at the door
Turns the torch down to the floor,
Till the world is seen no more ;

In the doubt, the dark, the fear,
'Mid the spirits come to take thee,
Shall mine to thine be near,
And my kiss the first to wake thee.
Meanwhile, in life's December,
On the wind that strews the ember,
Shall a voice still moan . . . "Remember !"

TRANSLATIONS FROM PETER RONSARD.

"VOICI LE BOIS QUE MA SAINCTE ANGELETTE."

Here is the wood that freshened to her song ;
See here, the flowers that keep her footprints yet ;
Where, all alone, my saintly Angelette
Went wandering, with her maiden thoughts, along.

Here is the little rivulet where she stopped ;
And here the greenness of the grass shows where
She lingered through it, searching here and there
Those daisies dear, which in her breast she dropped.

Here did she sing, and here she wept, and here
Her smile came back ; and here I seem to hear
Those faint half-words with which my thoughts are rife :

Here did she sit; here, childlike, did she dance,
To some vague impulse of her own romance —
Ah, Love, on all these thoughts, winds out my life!

"CACHE POUR CETTE NUICT."

Hide, for a night, thy horn, good Moon! Fair fortune
For this shall keep Endymion ever prest
Deep-dreaming, amorous, on thine argent breast,
Nor ever shall enchanter thee importune.

Hateful to me the day; most sweet the night!
I fear the myriad meddling eyes of day;
But courage comes with night. Close, close, I pray,
Your curtains, dear dark skies, on my delight!

Thou too, thou Moon, thou too hast felt love's power!
Pan, with a white fleece, won thee for an hour;
And you, sidereal Signs in yonder blue,

Favor the fire to which my heart is moved.
Forget not, Signs, the greater part of you
Was only set in heaven for having loved!

"PAGE SUY MOY."

Follow, my Page, where the green grass embosoms
The enamelled Season's freshest-fallen dew;
Then home, and my still house with handfuls strew
Of frail-lived April's newliest nurtured blossoms.

Take from the wall now, my song-tunéd Lyre;
Here will I sit and charm out the sweet pain
Of a dark eye whose light hath burned my brain,
The unloving loveliness of my desire!

And here my ink, and here my papers, place: —
A hundred leaves of white, whereon to trace
A hundred words of desultory woe —
Words which shall last, like graven diamonds, sure; —
That, some day hence, a future race may know
And ponder on the pain which I endure.

"LES ESPICES SONT À CERES."

Ceres hath her harvest sweet:
Chlora's is the young green grass:
Woods for Fauns with cloven feet:
His green laurel Phœbus has:
Minerva has her Olive-tree:
And the Pine's for Cybele.

Sweet sounds are for Zephyr's wings:
Sweet fruit for Pomona's bosom:
For the Nymphs are crystal springs
And for Flora bud and blossom:
But sighs and tears, and sad ideas,
These alone are Cytherea's.

"MA DOUCE JOUVENCE."

My sweet youth now is all done;
The strength and the beauty are gone.
The tooth now is black, and the head now is white,
And the nerves now are loosed: in the veins
Only water (not blood now) remains,
Where the pulse beat of old with delight.

Adieu, O my lyre, O adieu,
You sweet women, my lost loves, and you
Each dead passion! . . . The end creepeth nigher.
Not one pastime of youth has kept pace
With my age. Nought remains in their place
But the bed, and the cup, and the fire.

My head is confused with low fears,
And sickness, and too many years;
Some care in each corner I meet —
And, wherever I linger or go,
I turn back, and look after, to know
If the Death be still dogging my feet: —

Dogging me down the dark stair,
Which windeth, I cannot tell where,
To some Pluto that opens forever
His cave to all comers — Alas!
How easily down it all pass,
And return from it — never, ah, never!

BOOK III.—IN ENGLAND.

THE ALOE.

A STRANGER sent from burning lands,
In realms where buzz and mutter yet
Old gods, with hundred heads and hands,
On jewelled thrones of jet, —

(Old gods as old as Time itself,)
And, in a hot and level calm,
Recline o'er many a sandy shelf
Dusk forms beneath the palm, —

To Lady Eve, who dwells beside
The river-meads, and oak-trees tall,
Whose dewy shades encircle wide
Her old Baronial Hall,

An Indian plant with leaves like horn,
And, all along its stubborn spine,
Mere humps, with angry spike and thorn
Armed like the porcupine.

In midst of which one sullen bud
Surveyed the world, with head aslant,
High-throned, and looking like the god
Of this strange Indian plant.

A stubborn plant, from looking cross
It seemed no kindness could retrieve!
But for his sake whose gift it was
It pleased the Lady Eve.

She set it on the terraced walk,
Within her own fair garden-ground;
And every morn and eve its stalk
Was duly watered round.

And every eve and morn, the while
She tended this uncourteous thing,
I stood beside her, — watched her smile,
And often heard her sing.

The roses I at times would twist
To deck her hair, she oft forgot;
But never that dark aloe missed
The daily watering-pot.

She seemed so gay, — I felt so sad, —
Her laugh but made me frown the more:
For each light word of hers I had
Some sharp reply in store.

Until she laughed . . . "This aloe shows
A kindlier nature than your own" . . .
Ah, Eve, you little dreamed what foes
The plant and I had grown!

At last, one summer night, when all
The garden-flowers were dreaming still,
And still the old Baronial Hall,
The oak-trees on the hill,

A loud and sudden sound there stirred,
As when a thunder-cloud is torn;
Such thunder-claps are only heard
When little gods are born.

The echo went from place to place,
And wakened every early sleeper.
Some said that poachers in the chase
Had slain a buck — or keeper.

Some hinted burglars at the door:
Some questioned if it had not lightened:
While all the maids, as each one swore,
From their seven wits were frightened.

The peacocks screamed, and every rook
Upon the elms at roost did caw:
Each inmate straight the house forsook:
They searched — and, last, — they saw

That sullen bud to flower had burst
Upon the sharp-leaved aloe there; —
A wondrous flower, whose breath disperst
Rich odors on the air.

A flower, colossal — dazzling white,
And fair as is a Sphinx's face,
Turned broadly to the moon by night
From some vast temple's base.

Yes, Eve! your aloe paid the pains
With which its sullen growth you nurst.
But ah! my nature yet remains
As churlish as at first.

And yet, and yet — it might have proved
Not all unworth your heart's approving.
Ah, had I only been beloved, —
(Beloved as I was loving!)

I might have been . . . how much, how much,
I am not now, and shall not be!
One gentle look, one tender touch,
Had done so much for me!

I too, perchance, if kindly tended,
Had roused the napping generation,
With something novel, strange, and splendid,
Deserving admiration:

For all the while there grew, and grew
A germ, — a bud, within my bosom:
No flower, fair Eve! — for, thanks to you,
It never came to blossom.

"MEDIO DE FONTE LEPORUM SURGIT AMARI ALIQUID."

LUCRETIUS.

We walked about at Hampton Court,
Alone in sunny weather,
And talked — half earnest, and half sport,
Linked arm in arm together.

I pressed her hand upon the steps.
Its warmest light the sky lent.
She sought the shade: I sought her lips:
We kissed: and then were silent.

Clare thought, no doubt, of many things,
Besides the kiss I stole there; —
The sun, and sunny founts in rings,
The bliss of soul with soul there,

The bonnet, fresh from France, she wore,
My praise of how she wore it,
The arms above the carven door,
The orange-trees before it; —

But I could only think, as, mute
I watched her happy smile there,
With rising pain, of this curst boot,
That pinched me all the while there.

THE DEATH OF KING HACON.

It was Odin that whispered in Vingolf,
"Go forth to the heath by the sea;
Find Hacon before the moon rises,
And bid him to supper with me."

They go forth to choose from the Princes
Of Yngvon, and summons from fight
A man who must perish in battle,
And sup where the gods sup to-night.

Leaning over her brazen spear, Gondula
Thus bespake her companions, "The feast
Of the gods shall, in Vingolf, this evening,
O ye Daughters of War, be increast.

"For Odin hath beckoned unto me,
For Odin hath whispered me forth,
To bid to his supper King Hacon
With the half of the hosts of the North."

Their horses gleamed white through the vapor:
In the moonlight their corselets did shine:
As they wavered and whispered together,
And fashioned their solemn design.

Hacon heard them discoursing — "Why hast thou
Thus disposed of the battle so soon?
O, were we not worthy of conquest?
Lo! we die by the rise of the moon."

"It is not the moon that is rising,
But the glory which penetrates death,
When heroes to Odin are summoned:
Rise, Hacon, and stand on the heath!

"It is we," she replied, "that have given
To thy pasture the flower of the fight,
It is we, it is we that have scattered
Thine enemies yonder in flight.

"Come now, let us push on our horses
Over yonder green worlds in the east,
Where the great gods are gathered together,
And the tables are piled for the feast.

"Betimes to give notice to Odin,
Who waits in his sovran abodes,
That the King to his palace is coming
This evening to visit the gods."

Odin rose when he heard it, and with him
Rose the gods, every god to his feet.
He beckoned Hermoder and Brago,
They came to him, each from his seat.

"Go forth, O my sons, to King Hacon,
And meet him and greet him from all,
A King that we know by his valor
Is coming to-night to our hall."

Then faintly King Hacon approaches,
Arriving from battle, and sore
With the wounds that yet bleed through his armor
Bedabbled and dripping with gore.

His visage is pallid and awful
With the awe and the pallor of death,
Like the moon that at midnight arises
Where the battle lies strewn on the heath.

To him spake Hermoder and Brago,
"We meet thee and greet thee from all,
To the gods thou art known by thy valor,
And they bid thee a guest to their hall.

"Come hither, come hither, King Hacon,
And join those eight brothers of thine,
Who already, awaiting thy coming,
With the gods in Walhala recline.

"And loosen, O Hacon, thy corselet,
For thy wounds are yet ghastly to see.
Go pour ale in the circle of heroes,
And drink, for the gods drink to thee."

But he answered, the hero, "I never
Will part with the armor I wear.
Shall a warrior stand before Odin
Unshamed, without helmet and spear?"

Black Fenris, the wolf, the destroyer,
Shall arise and break loose from his chain
Before that a hero like Hacon
Shall stand in the battle again.

"CARPE DIEM."

HORACE.

To-MORROW is a day too far
To trust, whate'er the day be.
We know, a little, what we are,
But who knows what he may be?

The oak that on the mountain grows
A goodly ship may be,
Next year; but it is as well (who knows?)
May be a gallows-tree.

'T is God made man, no doubt, — not Chance:
He made us, great and small;
But, being made, 't is Circumstance
That finishes us all.

The Author of this world's great plan
The same results will draw
From human life, however man
May keep, or break, His law.

The Artist to his Art doth look;
And Art's great laws exact
That those portrayed in Nature's Book,
Should freely move and act.

The moral of the work unchanged
Endures eternally,
Howe'er by human wills arranged
The work's details may be.

"Give us this day our daily bread,
The morrow shall take heed
Unto itself." The Master said
No more. No more we need.

To-morrow cannot make or mar
To-day, whate'er the day be:
Nor can the men which now we are
Foresee the men we may be.

THE FOUNT OF TRUTH.

It was the place by legends told.
I read the tale when yet a child.
The castle on the mountain hold,
The woodland in the wild.

The wrecks of unremembered days
Were heaped around. It was the hour
When bold men fear, and timorous fays
Grow bold, and know their power.

The month was in the downward year.
The breath of Autumn chilled the sky:
And useless leaves, too early sere,
Muttered and eddied by.

It seemed that I was wending back
Among the ruins of my youth,
Along a wild night-haunted track
To seek the Fount of Truth.

The Fount of Truth, — that wondrous fount!
Its solemn sound I seemed to hear
Wind-borne adown the clouded mount,
Desolate, cold, and clear.

By clews long lost, and found again
I know not how, my course was led
Through lands remote from living men,
As life is from the dead.

Yet up that wild road, here and there,
Large, awful footprints did I meet:
Footprints of gods perchance they were,
Prints — not of human feet.

The mandrake underneath my foot
Gave forth a shriek of angry pain.
I heard the roar of some wild brute
Prowling the windy plain.

I reached the gate. I blew with power
A blast upon the darkness wide.
"Who art thou?" from the gloomy tower
The sullen warder cried.

"A Pilgrim to the Fount of Truth."
He laughed a laugh of scornful spleen.
"Art thou not from the Land of Youth?
Report where thou hast been."

"The Land of Youth! an alien race
There, in my old dominions, reign;
And, with them, one in whose false face
I will not gaze again.

"From to and fro the world I come,
Where I have fared as exiles fare,
Mocked by the memories of home
And homeless everywhere.

"The snake that slid through Paradise
Yet on my pathway slides and slips:
The apple plucked in Eden twice
Is yet upon my lips.

"I can report the world is still
Where it hath been since it began:
And Wisdom, with bewildered will,
Is still the same sick man,

"Whom yet the self-same visions fool,
The self-same nightmares haunt and scare.
Folly still breeds the Public Fool,
Knowledge increaseth care:

"Joy hath his tears, and Grief her smile;
And still both tears and smiles deceive.
And in the Valley of the Nile
I hear — and I believe —

"The Fiend and Michael, as of yore,
Yet wage the ancient war: but how
This strife will end at last, is more
Than our new sages know."

I heard the gate behind me close.
It closed with a reluctant wail.
Roused by the sound from her repose
Started the Porteress pale:

In pity, or in scorn . . . "Forbear,
Madman," she cried, . . . "thy search for Truth.
The curl is in thy careless hair.
Return to Love and Youth.

"What lured thee here, through dark, and doubt,
The many-perilled prize to win?" —
"The dearth" . . . I said . . . "of all without,
The thirst of all within.

"Age comes not with the wrinkled brow
But earlier, with the ravaged heart;
Full oft hath fallen the winter snow
Since Love from me did part.

"Long in dry places, void of cheer,
Long have I roamed. These features scan:
If magic lore be thine, look here,
Behold the Talisman!"

I crossed the court. The bloodhound bayed
Behind me from the outer wall.
The drowsy grooms my call obeyed
And lit the haunted hall.

They brought me horse, and lance, and helm,
They bound the buckler on my breast,
Spread the weird chart of that wild realm,
And armed me for the quest.

Uprose the Giant of the Keep.
"Rash fool, ride on!" . . . I heard him say,
"The night is late, the heights are steep,
And Truth is far away!"

And . . . "Far away!" . . . the echoes fell
Behind, as from that grisly hold
I turned. No tongue of man may tell
What mine must leave untold.

The Fount of Truth, — that wondrous fount!
Far off I heard its waters play.
But ere I scaled the solemn mount,
Dawn broke. The trivial day

To its accustomed course flowed back,
And all the glamour faded round.
Is it forever lost, — that track?
Or — was it never found?

MIDGES.

She is talking æsthetics, the dear clever creature!
Upon Man, and his functions, she speaks with a smile.
Her ideas are divine upon Art, upon Nature,
The Sublime, the Heroic, and Mr. Carlyle.

I no more am found worthy to join in the talk, now;
So I follow with my surreptitious cigar;
While she leads our poetical friend up the walk, now,
Who quotes Wordsworth and praises her "*Thoughts on a Star.*"

Meanwhile, there is dancing in yonder green bower
A swarm of young midges. They dance high and low
'T is a sweet little species that lives but one hour,
And the eldest was born half an hour ago.

One impulsive young midge I hear ardently pouring
In the ears of a shy little wanton in gauze,
His eternal devotion; his ceaseless adoring;
Which shall last till the Universe breaks from its laws:

His passion is not, he declares, the mere fever
Of a rapturous moment. It knows no control:
It will burn in his breast through existence forever,
Immutably fixed in the deeps of the soul!

She wavers: she flutters: . . . male midges are fickle:
Dare she trust him her future? . . . she asks with a sigh:
He implores, . . . and a tear is beginning to trickle:
She is weak: they embrace, and . . . the lovers pass by.

While they pass me, down here on a rose leaf has lighted
A pale midge, his feelers all drooping and torn:
His existence is withered; its future is blighted:
His hopes are betrayed: and his breast is forlorn.

By the midge his heart trusted his heart is deceived, now
In the virtue of midges no more he believes:
From love in its falsehood, once wildly believed, now
He will bury his desolate life in the leaves.

His friends would console him . . . the noblest and sagest
Of midges have held that a midge lives again.
In Eternity, say they, the strife thou now wagest
With sorrow shall cease . . . but their words are in vain!

Can Eternity bring back the seconds now wasted
In hopeless desire? or restore to his breast
The belief he has lost, with the bliss he once tasted,
Embracing the midge that his being loved best?

His friends would console him . . . life yet is before him;
Many hundred long seconds he still has to live:

In the state yet a mighty career spreads before him :
Let him seek in the great world of action to strive !

There is Fame ! there 's Ambition ! and, grander than either,
There is Freedom ! . . . the progress and march of the race ! . . .
But to Freedom his breast beats no longer, and neither
Ambition nor action her loss can replace.

If the time had been spent in acquiring æsthetics
I have squandered in learning this language of midges,
There might, for my friend in her peripatetics,
Have been now *two* asses to help o'er the bridges.

As it is, . . . I 'll report her the whole conversation.
It would have been longer ; but, somehow or other
(In the midst of that misanthrope's long lamentation),
A midge in my right eye became a young mother.

Since my friend is so clever, I 'll ask her to tell me
Why the least living thing (a mere midge in the egg !)
Can make a man's tears flow, as now it befell me . . .
O you dear clever woman, explain it, I beg !

THE LAST TIME THAT I MET LADY RUTH.

There are some things hard to understand.
O help me, my God, to trust in thee !
But I never shall forget her soft white hand,
And her eyes when she looked at me.

It is hard to pray the very same prayer
Which once at our mother's knee we prayed —
When, where we trusted our whole heart, there
Our trust hath been betrayed.

I swear that the milk-white muslin so light
On her virgin breast, where it lay demure,
Seemed to be toucht to a purer white
By the touch of a breast so pure.

I deemed her the one thing undefiled
By the air we breathe, in a world of sin:
The truest, the tenderest, purest child
A man ever trusted in !

When she blamed me (she, with her fair child's face !)
That never with her to the Church I went
To partake of the Gospel of truth and grace,
And the Christian sacrament,

And I said I would go for her own sweet sake,
Though it was but herself I should worship there,
How that happy child's face strove to take
On its dimples a serious air !

I remember the chair she would set for me,
By the flowers, when all the house was gone
To drive in the Park, and I and she
Were left to be happy alone.

There she leaned her head on my knees, my Ruth,
With the primrose loose in her half-closed hands :
And I told her tales of my wandering youth
In the far fair foreign lands. —

The last time I met her was here in town,
At a fancy ball at the Duchess of D.,
On the stairs, where her husband was handing her down.
— There we met, and she talked to me.

She, with powder in hair, and patch on chin,
And I, in the garb of a pilgrim Priest,
And between us both, without and within,
A hundred years at least !

We talked of the House, and the late long rains,
And the crush at the French Ambassador's ball,
And . . . well, I have not blown out my brains.
You see I can laugh. That is all.

MATRIMONIAL COUNSELS.

You are going to marry my pretty relation,
My dove-like young cousin, so soft in the eyes,
You are entering on life's settled dissimulation,
And, if you 'd be happy, in season be wise.

Take my counsel. The more that, in church, you are tempted
To yawn at the sermon, the more you 'll attend.
The more you 'd from milliner's bills be exempted,
The more on your wife's little wishes you 'll spend.

You 'll be sure, every Christmas, to send to the rector
A dozen of wine, and a hamper or two.
The more your wife plagues you, the more you 'll respect her,
She 'll be pleasing your friend, if she 's not plaguing you.

For women of course, like ourselves, need emotion;
And happy the husband, whose failings afford
To the wife of his heart, such good cause for commotion,
That she seeks no excitement, save plaguing her lord.

Above all, you 'll be careful that nothing offends, too,
Your wife's lady's maid, though she give herself airs.
With the friend of a friend it is well to be friends too,
And especially so, when that friend lives up stairs.

Under no provocation you 'll ever avow yourself
A little put out, when you 're kept at the door,
And you never, I scarcely need say, will allow yourself
To call your wife's mother a vulgar old bore.

However she dresses, you 'll never suggest to her
That her taste, as to colors, could scarcely be worse,
Of the rooms in your house, you will give up the best to her,
And you never will ask for the carriage, of course.

If, at times with a doubt on the soul and her future,
Revelation and reason, existence should trouble you,
You 'll be always on guard to keep carefully mute your
Ideas on the subject, and read Dr. W.

Bring a shawl with you, home, when you come from the Club, sir,
Or a ring, lest your wife, when you meet her, should pout;
And don't fly in a rage and behave like a cub, sir,
If you find that the fire, like yourself, has gone out.

In eleven good instances out of a dozen,
'T is the husband 's a cur, when the wife is a cat.
She is meekness itself, my soft-eyed little cousin,
But a wife has her rights, and I 'd have you know that.

Keep my counsel. Life's struggles are brief to be borne, friend.
In Heaven there 's no marriage nor giving in marriage.
When Death comes, think how truly your widow will mourn, friend,
And your worth not the best of your friends will disparage!

SEE-SAW.

She was a harlot, and I was a thief:
But we loved each other beyond belief:

She lived in the garret, and I in the kitchen,
And love was all that we both were rich in.

When they sent her at last to the hospital,
Both day and night my tears did fall;
They fell so fast that, to dry their grief,
I borrowed my neighbor's handkerchief.

The world, which, as it is brutally taught,
Still judges the act in lieu of the thought,
Found my hand in my neighbor's pocket,
And clapped me, at once, under chain and locket.

When they asked me about it, I told them plain,
Love it was that had turned my brain:
How should I heed where my hand had been,
When my heart was dreaming of Celestine?

Twelve friends were so struck by my woful air,
That they sent me abroad for change of air:
And, to prove me the kindness of their intent,
They sent me at charge of the Government.

When I came back again, — whom, think you, I meet
But Celestine, here, in Regent Street?
In a carriage adorned with a coronet,
And a dress, all flounces, and lace, and jet:

For her carriage drew up to the bookseller's door,
Where they publish those nice little books for the poor:
I took off my hat: and my face she knew,
And gave me — a sermon by Mr. Bellew.

But she gave me (God bless her!) along with the book,
Such a sweet sort of smile, such a heavenly look,
That, as long as I live, I shall never forget
Celestine, in her coach with the earl's coronet.

There 's a game that men play at in great London-town;
Whereby some must go up, sir, and some must go down:
And, since the mud sticks to your coat if you fall,
Why, the strongest among us keep close to the wall.

But some day, soon or late, in my shoes I shall stand,
More exalted than any great Duke in the land;
A clean shirt on my back, and a rose in my coat,
And a collar conferred by the Queen round my throat.

And I know that my Celestine will not forget
To be there, in her coach with my lord's coronet:
She will smile to me then, as she smiled to me now:
I shall nod to her gayly, and make her my bow; —

Before I rejoin all those famous old thieves
Whose deeds have immortalized Rome, sir, and Greece:
Whose names are inscribed upon History's leaves,
Like my own on the books of the City Police: —

Alexander, and Cæsar, and other great robbers,
Who once tried to pocket the whole universe:
Not to speak of our own parliamentary jobbers,
With their hands, bless them all, in the popular purse!

BABYLONIA.

Enough of simpering and grimace!
Enough of damning one's soul for nothing!
Enough of Vacuity trimmed with lace!
And Poverty proud of her purple clothing!
In Babylon, whene'er there 's a wind
(Whether it blow rain, or whether it blow sand),

The weathercocks change their mighty mind ;
And the weathercocks are forty thousand.
Forty thousand weathercocks,
Each well-minded to keep his place,
Turning about in the great and small ways !
Each knows, whatever the weather's shocks,
That the wind will never blow in his face ;
And in Babylon the wind blows always.

I cannot tell how it may strike you,
But it strikes me now, for the first and last time,
That there may be better things to do,
Than watching the weathercocks for pastime.
And I wish I were out of Babylon,
Out of sight of column and steeple,
Out of fashion and form, for one,
And out of the midst of this double-faced people.
Enough of catgut ! Enough of the sight
Of the dolls it sets dancing all the night !
For there is a notion come to me,
As here, in Babylon, I am lying,
That far away, over the sea,
And under another moon and star,
Braver, more beautiful beings are dying
(Dying, not dancing, dying, dying !)
To a music nobler far.

Full well I know that, before it came
To inhabit this feeble, faltering frame,
My soul was weary ; and, ever since then,
It has seemed to me, in the stir and bustle
Of this eager world of women and men,
That my life was tired before it began,
That even the child had fatigued the man,
And brain and heart have done their part
To wear out sinew and muscle.

Yet, sometimes, a wish has come to me,
To wander, wander, I know not where,
Out of the sight of all that I see,
Out of the hearing of all that I hear ;
Where only the tawny, bold, wild beast
Roams his realms ; and find, at least,
The strength which even the beast finds there,
A joy, though but a savage joy ; —
Were it only to find the food I need,
The scent to track, and the force to destroy,
And the very appetite to feed ;
The bliss of the sense without the thought,
And the freedom, for once in my life, from aught
That fills my life with care.

And never this thought hath so wildly crost
My mind, with its wildering, strange temptation,
As just when I was enjoying the most
The blessings of what is called Civilization : —
The glossy boot which tightens the foot ;
The club at which my friend was black-balled
(I am sorry, of course, but one must be exclusive) ;
The yellow kid glove whose shape I approve,
And the journal in which I am kindly called
Whatever 's not libellous — only abusive :
The ball to which I am careful to go,
Where the folks are so cool, and the rooms are so hot ;
The opera, which shows one what music — is not ;
And the simper from Lady . . . but why should you know ?

Yet, I am a part of the things I despise,
Since my life is bound by their common span :
And each idler I meet, in square or in street,
Hath within him what all that 's without him belies, —
The miraculous, infinite heart of man,
With its countless capabilities !
The sleekest guest at the general feast,
That at every sip, as he sups, says grace,
Hath in him a touch of the untamed beast ;
And change of nature is change of place.
The judge on the bench, and the scamp at the dock,
Have, in each of them, much that is common to both ;
Each is part of the parent stock,
And their difference comes of their different cloth.

'Twixt the Seven Dials and Exeter Hall
The gulf that is fixed is not so wide :
And the fool that, last year, at Her
Majesty's Ball,
Sickened me so with his simper of
pride,
Is the hero now heard of, the first on the
wall,
With the bayonet-wound in his side.

O, for the times which were (if any
Time be heroic) heroic indeed !
When the men were few,
And the deeds to do
Were mighty, and many,
And each man in his hand held a
noble deed.
Now the deeds are few,
And the men are many,
And each man has, at most, but a
noble need.

Blind fool ! . . . I know that all acted
time
By that which succeeds it, is ever re-
ceived
As calmer, completer, and more sublime,
Only because it is finished : because
We only behold the thing it achieved ;
We behold not the thing that it was.
For, while it stands whole and immuta-
ble,
In the marble of memory — we, who
have seen
But the statue before us, — how can we
tell
What the men that have hewn at the
block may have been ?
Their passion is merged in its passionless-
ness ;
Their strife in its stillness closed for-
ever :
Their change upon change in its change-
lessness ;
In its final achievement, their feverish
endeavor :
Who knows how sculptor on sculptor
starved
With the thought in the head by the
hand uncarved ?
And he that spread out in its ample re-
pose
That grand, indifferent, godlike brow,
How vainly his own may have ached,
who knows,
'Twixt the laurel above and the wrin-
kle below ?

So again to Babylon I come back,
Where this fettered giant of Human
Nature
Cramped in limb, and constrained in
stature,
In the torture-chamber of Vanity
lies ;
Helpless and weak, and compelled to
speak
The things he must despise.
You stars, so still in the midnight blue,
Which over these huddling roofs I view,
Out of reach of this Babylonian riot, —
We so restless, and you so quiet,
What is difference 'twixt us and you ?

You each may have pined with a pain
divine,
For aught I know,
As wildly as this weak heart of mine,
In an Age ago :
For whence should you have that stern
repose,
Which, here, dwells but on the brows
of those
Who have lived, and survived life's
fever,
Had you never known the ravage and fire
Of that inexpressible Desire,
Which wastes and calcines whatever is
less
In the soul, than the soul's deep con-
sciousness
Of a life that shall last forever ?

Doubtless, doubtless, again and again,
Many a mouth has starved for bread
In a city whose wharves are choked
with corn
And many a heart hath perished dead
From being too utterly forlorn,
In a city whose streets are choked with
men.
Yet the bread is there, could one find it
out :
And there is a heart for a heart, no doubt,
Wherever a human heart may beat ;
And room for courage, and truth, and
love,
To move, wherever a man may move,
In the thickliest crowded street.

O Lord of the soul of man, whose will
Made earth for man, and man for
heaven,
Help all thy creatures to fulfil
The hopes to each one given !

So fair thou madest, and so complete,
The little daisies at our feet;
So sound, and so robust in heart,
The patient beasts, that bear their part
In this world's labor, never asking
The reason of its ceaseless tasking;
Hast thou made man, though more in kind,
By reason of his soul and mind,
Yet less in unison with life,
By reason of an inward strife,
Than these, thy simpler creatures, are,
Submitted to his use and care?

For these, indeed, appear to live
To the full verge of their own power,
Nor ever need that time should give
To life one space beyond the hour.
They do not pine for what is not;
Nor quarrel with the things which are;
Their yesterdays are all forgot;
Their morrows are not feared from far:
They do not weep, and wail, and moan,
For what is past, or what 's to be,
Or what 's not yet, and may be never;
They do not their own lives disown,
Nor haggle with eternity
For some unknown Forever.

Ah yet, — in this must I believe
That man is nobler than the rest: —
That, looking in on his own breast,
He measures thus his strength and size
With supernatural destinies,
Whose shades o'er all his being fall;
And, in that dread comparison
'Twixt what is deemed and what is done,
He can, at intervals, perceive
How weak he is, and small.

Therefore, he knows himself a child,
Set in this rudimental star,
To learn the alphabet of Being;
By straws dismayed, by toys beguiled,
Yet conscious of a home afar;
With all things here but ill agreeing,
Because he trusts, in manhood's prime,
To walk in some celestial clime;
Sit in his Father's house; and be
The inmate of Eternity.

BOOK IV.—IN SWITZERLAND.

THE HEART AND NATURE.

The lake is calm; and, calm, the skies
In yonder silent sunset glow,
Where, o'er the woodland, homeward flies
The solitary crow;

The woodman to his hut is gone;
The wood-dove in the elm is still;
The last sheep drinks, and wanders on
To graze at will.

Nor aught the pensive prospect breaks,
Save where my slow feet stir the grass,
Or where the trout to diamonds breaks
The lake's pale glass.

No moan the cushat makes, to heave
A leaflet round her windless nest;
The air is silent in the eve;
The world 's at rest.

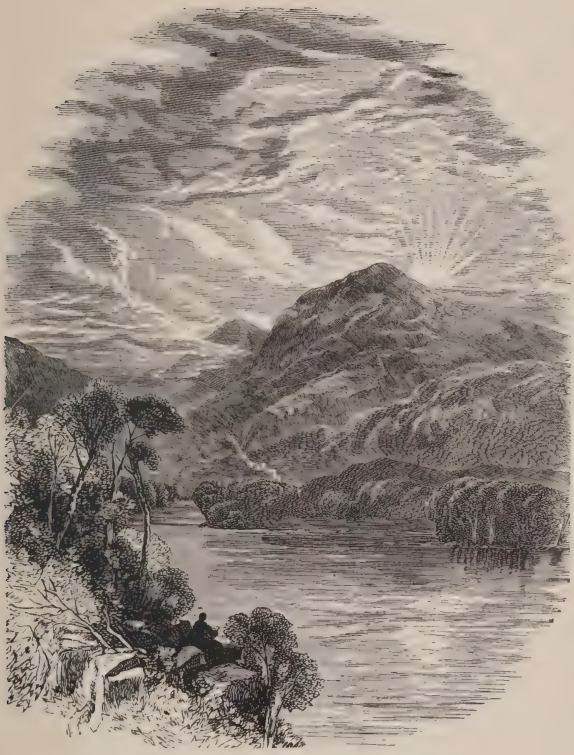
All bright below; all calm above;
No sense of pain, no sign of wrong;
Save in thy heart of hopeless love,
Poor child of Song!

Why must the soul through Nature rove,
At variance with her general plan?
A stranger to the Power, whose love
Soothes all save Man?

Why lack the strength of meaner creatures?
The wandering sheep, the grazing kine,
Are surer of their simple natures
Than I of mine.

For all their wants the poorest land
Affords supply; they browse and breed;
I scarce divine, and ne'er have found,
What most I need.

O God, that in this human heart
Hath made Belief so hard to grow,
And set the doubt, the pang, the smart
In all we know —



"The lake is calm; and calm, the skies." Page 222.

Why hast thou, too, in solemn jest
At this tormented thinking-power,
Inscribed, in flame on yonder West,
In hues on every flower,

Through all the vast unthinking sphere
Of mere material Force without,
Rebuke so vehement and severe
To the least doubt ?

And robed the world and hung the night,
With silent, stern, and solemn forms ;
And strown with sounds of awe and might,
The seas and storms, —

All lacking power to impart
To man the secret he assails,
But armed to crush him, if his heart
Once doubts or fails !

To make him feel the same forlorn
Despair the Fiend hath felt ere now,
In gazing at the stern sweet scorn
On Michael's brow.

A QUIET MOMENT.

Stay with me, Lady, while you may !
For life's so sad, — this hour's so sweet ;
Ah, Lady, — life too long will stay ;
Too soon this hour will fleet.

How fair this mountain's purple bust,
Alone in high and glimmering air !
And see, . . . those village spires, upthrust
From yon dark plain, — how fair !

How sweet yon lone and lovely scene,
And yonder dropping fiery ball,
And eve's sweet spirit, that steals, unseen,
With darkness over all !

This blessèd hour is yours, and eve's ;
And this is why it seems so sweet
To lie, as husht as fallen leaves
In autumn, at your feet ;

And watch, awhile released from care,
The twilight in yon quiet skies,
The twilight in your quiet hair,
The twilight in your eyes :

Till in my soul the twilight stays,
— Eve's twilight, since the dawn's is o'er !
And life's too well-known worthless days
Become unknown once more.

Your face is no uncommon face ;
Like it, I have seen many a one,
And may again, before my race
Of care be wholly run.

But not the less, those earnest brows,
And that pure oval cheek can charm ;—
Those eyes of tender deep repose ;
That breast, the heart keeps warm.

Because a sense of goodness sleeps
In every sober, soft, brown tress,
That o'er those brows, uncared for, keeps
Its shadowy quietness :

Because that lip's soft silence shows,
Though passion it hath never known,
That well, to kiss one kiss, it knows —
— A woman's holiest one !

Yours is the charm of calm good sense,
Of wholesome views of earth and heaven,
Of pity, touched with reverence,
To all things freely given.

Your face no sleepless midnight fills,
For all its serious sweet endeavor ;
It plants no pang, no rapture thrills,
But ah ! — it pleases ever !

Not yours is Cleopatra's eye,
And Juliet's tears you never knew :
Never will amorous Antony
Kiss kingdoms out for you !

Never for you will Romeo's love,
From deeps of moonlit musing, break
To poetry about the glove
Whose touch may press your cheek.

But ah, in one, — no Antony
Nor Romeo now, nor like to these, —
(Whom neither Cleopatra's eye,
Nor Juliet's tears, could please)

How well they lull the lurking care
Which else within the mind endures, —
That soft white hand, that soft dark hair,
And that soft voice of yours !

So, while you stand, a fragile form,
With that close shawl around you drawn,
And eve's last ardors fading warm
Adown the mountain lawn,

'T is sweet, although we part to-morrow,
And ne'er, the same, shall meet again,
Awhile, from old habitual sorrow
To cease ; to cease from pain ;

To feel that, ages past, the soul
Hath lived — and ages hence will live ;
And taste, in hours like this, the whole
Of all the years can give.

Then, Lady, yet one moment stay,
While your sweet face makes all things sweet,
For ah, the charm will pass away
Before again we meet !

NÆNIÆ.

Soft, soft be thy sleep in the land of the West,
Fated maiden !
Fair lie the flowers, love, and light, on thy breast
Passion-laden,
In the place where thou art, by the storm-beaten strand
Of the moaning Atlantic,
While, alone with my sorrow, I roam through thy land,
The beloved, the romantic !
And thy faults, child, sleep where in those dark eyes Death closes
All their doings and undoings ;
For who counts the thorns on last year's perisht roses ?
Smile, dead rose, in thy ruins !
With thy beauty, its frailty is over.
No token
Of all which thou wast !
Not so much as the stem whence the blossom was broken
Hath been spared by the frost.
With thy lips, and thine eyes, and thy long golden tresses,
Cold . . . and so young too !
All lost, like the sweetness which died with our kisses,
On the lips we once clung to.
Be it so ! O too loved, and too lovely, to linger
Where Age in its bareness
Creeps slowly, and Time with his terrible finger
Effaces all fairness.
Thy being was but beauty, thy life only rapture,
And, ere both were over,
Or yet one delight had escaped from thy capture,
Death came, — thy last lover,
And found thee, . . . no care on thy brow, in thy tresses
No silver — all gold there !
On thy lips, when he kissed them, their last human kisses
Had scarcely grown cold there.
Thine was only earth's joy, not its sorrow, its sinning,
Its friends that are foes too.
O, fair was thy life in its lovely beginning,
And fair in its close too !
But I ? . . . since we parted, both mournful and many
Life's changes have been to me :
And of all the love-garlands Youth wove me, not any
Remain that are green to me.
O, where are the nights, with thy touch and thy breath in them,
Faint with heart-beating ?
The fragrance, the darkness, the life and the death in them,
— Parting and meeting ?
All the world ours in that hour ! . . .
O, the silence,
The moonlight, and, far in it,
O, the one nightingale singing a mile hence !
The oped window — one star in it !
Sole witness of stolen sweet moments, unguest of
By the world in its primness ; —
Just one smile to adore by the starlight : the rest of
Thy soul in the dimness !
If I glide through the door of thy chamber, and sit there,
The old, faint, uncertain
Fragrance, that followed thee, surely will flit there, —
O'er the chairs, — in the curtain : —
But thou ? . . . O thou missed, and thou mourned one ! O never,
Nevermore, shall we rove
Through chamber, or garden, or by the dark river
Soft lamps burn above !

O dead, child, dead, dead — all the shrunken romance
Of the dream life begun with!
But thou, love, canst alter no more — smile or glance;
Thy last change is done with.
As a moon that is sunken, a sunset that's o'er,
So thy face keeps the semblance
Of the last look of love, the last grace that it wore,
In my mourning remembrance.
As a strain from the last of thy songs, when we parted,
Whose echoes thrill yet,
Through the long dreamless nights of sad years, lonely-hearted,
With their haunting regret, —
Though nerveless the hand now, and shattered the lute too,
Once vocal for me,
There floats through life's ruins, when all's dark and mute too,
The music of thee!
Beauty, how brief! Life, how long! . . . well, love's done now!
Down the path fate arranged for me
I tread faster, because I must tread it alone now.
— This is all that is changed for me.
My heart must have broken, ere I broke the fetter
Thyself didst undo, love.
— Ah, there's many a purer, and many a better,
But more loved, . . . O, how few, love!

BOOK V.—IN HOLLAND.

AUTUMN.

So now, then, Summer's over — by degrees.
Hark! 't is the wind in yon red region grieves.
Who says the world grows better, growing old?
See! what poor trumpery on those pauper trees,
That cannot keep, for all their fine gold leaves,
Their last bird from the cold.

This is Dame Nature, puckered, pinched, and sour,
Of all the charms her poets praised, bereft,
Scowling and scolding (only hear her, there!)
Like that old spiteful Queen, in her last hour,
Whom Spenser, Shakespeare, sung to . . . nothing left
But wrinkles and red hair!

LEAFLESS HOURS.

The pale sun, through the spectral wood,
Gleams sparely, where I pass:
My footstep, silent as my mood,
Falls in the silent grass.
Only my shadow points before me,
Where I am moving now:
Only sad memories murmur o'er me
From every leafless bough:
And out of the nest of last year's Redbreast
Is stolen the very snow.

ON MY TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR.

The night's in November: the winds are at strife:
The snow 's on the hill, and the ice on the mere:
The world to its winter is turned: and my life
To its twenty-fourth year.

The swallows are flown to the south long ago:
The roses are fallen: the woodland is sere.
Hope 's flown with the swallows: Love's rose will not grow
In my twenty-fourth year.

The snow on the threshold: the cold at the heart:
But the fagot to warm, and the wine-cup to cheer:

God's help to look up to: and courage to start
On my twenty-fourth year.

And 't is well that the month of the roses is o'er!
The last, which I plucked for Neræa to wear,
She gave her new lover. A man should do more
With his twenty-fourth year

Than mourn for a woman, because she 's unkind,
Or pine for a woman, because she is fair.
Ah, I loved you, Neræa! But now . . . never mind,
'T is my twenty-fourth year!

What a thing! to have done with the follies of Youth,
Ere Age brings ITS follies! . . . though many a tear
It should cost, to see Love fly away, and find Truth
In one's twenty-fourth year.

The Past's golden valleys are drained. I must plant
On the Future's rough upland new harvests, I fear.
Ho, the plough and the team! . . . who would perish of want
In his twenty-fourth year?

Man's heart is a well, which forever renews
The void at the bottom, no sounding comes near:
And Love does not die, though its object I lose
In my twenty-fourth year.

The great and the little are only in name.
The smoke from my chimney casts shadows as drear
On the heart, as the smoke from Vesuvius in flame:
And my twenty-fourth year,

From the joys that have cheered it, the cares that have troubled,
What is wise to pursue, what is well to revere,
May judge all as fully as though life were doubled
To its forty-eighth year!

If the prospect grow dim, 't is because it grows wide.
Every loss hath its gain. So, from sphere on to sphere,
Man mounts up the ladder of Time: so I stride
Up my twenty-fourth year!

Exulting? . . . no . . . sorrowing? . . . no . . . with a mind
Whose regret chastens hope, whose faith triumphs o'er fear:
Not repining: not confident: no, but resigned
To my twenty-fourth year.

JACQUELINE,

COUNTESS OF HOLLAND AND HAINAULT.*

Is it the twilight, or my fading sight,
Makes all so dim around me? No, the night
Is come already. See! through yonder pane,
Alone in the gray air, that star again —
Which shines so wan, I used to call it mine
For its pale face: like Countess Jacqueline
Who reigned in Brabant once . . . that 's years ago.
I called so much mine, then: so much seemed so!
And see, my own! — of all those things, my star
(Because God hung it there, in heaven, so far
Above the reach and want of those hard men)
Is all they have not taken from me. Then
I call it still My Star. Why not? The dust
Hath claimed the dust: no more. And moth and rust

* Who was married to the impotent and worthless John of Brabant, affianced to "good Duke Humphry," of Gloucester, and finally wedded to Frank von Borselen, a gentleman of Zealand, in consequence of which marriage she lost even the title of Countess. She died at the age of thirty-six, after a life of unparalleled adventure and misfortune. See any Biographical Dictionary, or any History of the Netherlands.

May rot the throne, the kingly purple fray : —
What then? Yon star saw kingdoms rolled away
Ere mine was taken from me. It survives.
But think, Beloved, — in that high life of lives,
When our souls see the suns themselves burn low
Before that Sun of Righteousness, — and know
What is, and was, before the suns were lit, —
How Love is all in all . . . Look, look at it,
My star, — God's star, — for being God's 't is mine :
Had it been man's . . . no matter . . . see it shine —
The old wan beam, which I have watched ere now
So many a wretched night, when this poor brow
Ached 'neath the sorrows of its thorny crown.
Its crown! . . . ah, droop not, dear, those fond eyes down.
No gem in all that shattered coronet
Was half so precious as the tear which wet
Just now this pale sick forehead. O my own,
My husband, need was, that I should have known
Much sorrow, — more than most Queens, — all know some, —
Ere, dying, I could bless thee for the home
Far dearer than the Palace, — call thy tear,
The costliest gem that ever sparkled here.

Infold me, my Belovéd. One more kiss.
O, I must go! 'T was willed I should not miss
Life's secret, ere I left it. And now see, —
My lips touch thine — thine arm encircles me —
The secret 's found — God beckons — I must go.
Earth's best is given. — Heaven's turn is come to show
How much its best earth's best may yet exceed,
Lest earth's should seem the very best indeed.

So we must part a little ; but not long.
I seem to see it all. My lands belong
To Philip still ; but thine will be my grave,
(The only strip of land which I could save !)
Not much, but wide enough for some few flowers,
Thou 'lt plant there, by and by, in later hours :
Duke Humphry, when they tell him I am dead
(And so young too !) will sigh, and shake his head,
And if his wife should chide, "Poor Jacqueline,"
He 'll add, "You know she never could be mine."
And men will say, when some one speaks of me,
"Alas, it was a piteous history,
The life of that poor countess!" For the rest
Will never know, my love, how I was blest.
Some few of my poor Zealanders, perchance,
Will keep kind memories of me ; and in France
Some minstrel sing my story. Pitiless John
Will prosper still, no doubt, as he has done,
And still praise God with blood upon the Rood.
Philip will, doubtless, still be called "The Good."
And men will curse and kill : and the old game
Will weary out new hands : the love of fame
Will sow new sins : thou wilt not be renowned :
And I shall lie quite quiet under ground.
My life is a torn book. But at the end
A little page, quite fair, is saved, my friend,
Where thou didst write thy name. No stain is there,
No blot, — from marge to marge, all pure — no tear ; —
The last page, saved from all, and writ by thee,
Which I shall take safe up to Heaven with me.
All 's not in vain, since this be so. Dost grieve?
Belovéd, I beseech thee to believe

Although this be the last page of my life,
It is my heart's first, only one. Thy wife,
Poor though she be, O thou sole wealth of mine,
Is happier than the Countess Jacqueline!

And since my heart owns thine, say, — am I not
A Queen, my chosen, though by all forgot?
Though all forsake, yet is not this thy hand?
I, a lone wanderer in a darkened land,
I, a poor pilgrim with no staff of hope,
I, a late traveller down the evening slope,
Where any spark, the glow-worm's by the way,
Had been a light to bless . . . have I, O say,
Not found, Belovéd, in thy tender eyes,
A light more sweet than morning's? As there dies
Some day of storm all glorious in its even,
My life grows loveliest as it fades in heaven.
This earthly house breaks up. This flesh must fade.
So many shocks of grief slow breach have made
In the poor frame. Wrongs, insults, treacheries,
Hopes broken down, and memory which sighs
In, like a night-wind! Life was never meant
To bear so much in such frail tenement.
Why should we seek to patch and plaster o'er
This shattered roof, crusht windows, broken door
The light already shines through? Let them break.

Yet would I gladly live for thy dear sake,
O my heart's first and last, if that could be!
In vain! . . . yet grieve not thou. I shall not see
England again, and those white cliffs; nor ever
Again those four gray towers beside the river,
And London's roaring bridges: never more
Those windows with the market-stalls before,
Where the red-kirtled market-girls went by
In the great square, beneath the great gray sky,
In Brussels: nor in Holland, night or day,
Watch those long lines of siege, and fight at bay
Among my broken army, in default
Of Gloucester's failing forces from Hainault:
Nor shall I pace again those gardens green,
With their clipt alleys, where they called me Queen,
In Brabant once. For all these things are gone.
But thee I shall behold, my chosen one,
Though we should seem whole worlds on worlds apart,
Because thou wilt be ever in my heart.
Nor shall I leave thee wholly. I shall be
An evening thought, — a morning dream to thee, —
A silence in thy life when, through the night,
The bell strikes, or the sun, with sinking light,
Smites all the empty windows. As there sprout
Daisies, and dimpling tufts of violets, out
Among the grass where some corpse lies asleep,
So round thy life, where I lie buried deep,
A thousand little tender thoughts shall spring,
A thousand gentle memories wind and cling.
O, promise me, my own, before my soul
Is houseless, — let the great world turn and roll
Upon its way unvext . . . Its pomps, its powers!
The dust says to the dust, . . . "the earth is ours."
I would not, if I could, be Queen again
For all the walls of the wide world contain.
Be thou content with silence. Who would raise
A little dust and noise of human praise,
If he could see, in yonder distance dim,
The silent eye of God that watches him?
Oh! couldst thou see all that I see to-night
Upon the brinks of the great Infinite!

"Come out of her, my people, lest ye be
Partakers of her sins!" . . . My love, but we
Our treasure where no thieves break in and steal,
Have stored, I trust. Earth's weal is not our weal.
Let the world mind its business — peace or war,
Ours is elsewhere. Look, look, — my star, my star!
It grows, it glows, it spreads in light unfurled; —
Said I "my star"? No star — a world — God's world!
What hymns adown the jasper sea are rolled,
Even to these sick pillows! Who infold
White wings about me? Rest, rest, rest . . . I come!
O Love! I think that I am near my home.
Whence was that music? Was it Heaven's I heard?
Write "Blesséd are the dead that die i' the Lord,
Because they rest," . . . because their toil is o'er.
The voice of weeping shall be heard no more
In the Eternal city. Neither dying
Nor sickness, pain nor sorrow, neither crying,
For God shall wipe away all tears. Rest, rest,
Thy hand, my husband, — so — upon thy breast!

MACROMICROS.

It is the star of solitude,
Alight in yon lonely sky.
The sea is silent in its mood,
Motherlike moaning a lullaby,
To hush the hungering mystery
To sleep on its breast subdued.
The night is alone, and I.

It is not the scene I am seeing,
The lonely sky and the sea,
It is the pathos of Being
That is making so dark in me
This silent and solemn hour: —
The bale of baffled power,
The wail of unbaffled desire,
The fire that must ever devour
The source by which it is fire.

My spirit expands, expands!
I spread out my soul on the sea.
I feel for yet unfound lands,
And I find but the land where She
Sits, with her sad white hands,
At her golden broidery,
In sight of the sorrowful sands,
In an antique gallery,
Where, ever beside her, stands
(Moodily mimicking me)
The ghost of a something her heart demands
For a blessing which cannot be.

And broider, broider by night and day
The brede of thy blazing broidery!
Till thy beauty be wholly woven away
Into the desolate tapestry.
Let the thread be scarlet, the gold be gay,
For the damp to dim, and the moth to fray:
Weave in the azure, and crimson, and green!
Till the slow threads, needling out and in,
To take a fashion and form begin:
Yet, for all the time and toil, I see
The work is vain, and will not be
Like what it was meant to have been.

O woman, woman, with face so pale!
Pale woman, weaving away
A frustrate life at a lifeless loom,
Early or late, 't is of little avail
That thou lightest the lamp in the gloom.
Full well, I see, there is coming a day
When the work shall forever rest incomplete.
Fling, fling the foolish blazon away,
And weave me a winding-sheet!

It is not for thee, in this dreary hour,
That *I* walk, companionless here by the shore.
I am caught in the eddy and whirl of a power
Which is not grief, and is not love,
Though it loves, and grieves,
Within me, without me, wherever I move
In the going out of the ghostly eves,
And is changing me more and more.
I am not mourning for thee, although

I love thee, and thou art lost :
Nor yet for myself, albeit I know
That my life is flawed and crost :
But for that sightless, sorrowing Soul
That is feeling, blind with immortal pain,
All round, for what it can never attain ;
That prisoned, pining, and passionate soul,
So vast, and yet so small ;
That seems, now nothing, now all,
That moves me to pity beyond control,
And repulses pity again.
I am mourning, since mourn I must,
With those patient Powers that bear,
'Neath the unattainable stars up there,
With the pomp and pall of funeral,
Subject and yet august,
The weight of this world's dust : —

The ruined giant under the rock :
The stricken spirit below the ocean :
And the winged things wounded of old by the shock
That set the earth in motion.

Ah yet, . . . and yet, and yet,
If She were here with me,
If she were here by the sea,
With the face I cannot forget,
Then all things would not be
So fraught with my own regret,
But what I should feel and see,
And seize it at last, at last, —
The secret known and lost in the past,
To unseal the Genii that sleep
In vials long hid in the deep ;
By forgotten, fashionless spells held fast,
Where through streets of the cities of coral, aghast,
The sea-nymphs wander and weep.

MYSTERY.

The hour was one of mystery,
When we were sailing, I and she,
Down the dark, the silent stream.
The stars above were pale with love,
And a wizard wind did faintly move,
Like a whisper through a dream.

Her head was on my breast,
Her loving little head !
Her hand in mine was prest,
And not a word we said ;
But round and round the night we wound,
Till we came at last to the Isle of Fays ;
And, all the while, from the magic isle,
Came that music, that music of other days !

The lamps in the garden gleamed.
The Palace was all alight.
The sound of the viols streamed
Through the windows over the night.
We saw the dancers pass
At the windows, two by two.
The dew was on the grass,
And the glow-worm in the dew.

We came through the grass to the cypress-tree.
We stood in its shadow, I and she.
"Thy face is pale, thine eyes are wild.
What aileth thee, what aileth thee ?"

"Naught aileth me," she murmured mild,
"Only the moonlight makes me pale ;
The moonlight, shining through the veil
Of this black cypress-tree."

"By yonder moon, whose light so soon
Will fade upon the gloom,
And this black tree, whose mystery
Is mingled with the tomb, —
By Love's brief moon, and Death's dark tree,
Lovest thou me ?"

Upon my breast she leaned her head ;
"By yonder moon and tree,
I swear that all my soul," she said,
"Is given to thee."

"I know not what thy soul may be,
Nor canst thou make it mine.
Yon stars may all be worlds : for me
Enough to know they shine.
Thou art mine evening star. I know
At dawn star-distant thou wilt be :
I shall not hear thee murmuring low ;
Thy face I shall not see.
I love thy beauty : 't will not stay :
Let it be all mine while it may.
I have no bliss save in the kiss
Thou givest me."

We came to the statue carved in stone,
Over the fountain. We stood there alone.

"What aileth thee, that thou dost sigh?
And why is thy hand so cold?"
"'T is the fountain that sighs," . . . she said, "not I;
And the statue, whose hand thou dost hold."

"By yonder fount, that flows forever,
And this statue, that cannot move, —
By the fountain of Time, that ceases never,
And the fixedness of Love, —
By motion and immutability
Lovest thou me?"

"By the fountain of Time, with its ceaseless flow,
And the image of Love that rests," sighed she,
"I love thee, I swear, come joy, come woe,
For eternity!"

"Eternity is a word so long
That I cannot spell it now:
For the nightingale is singing her song
From yon pomegranate bough.
Let it mean what it may — Eternity,
If thou lovest me now as I love thee,
As I love thee!"

We came to the Palace. We mounted the stair.
The great hall-doors wide open were.
And all the dancers that danced in the hall
Greeted us to the festival.

There were ladies, as fair as fair might be,
But not one of them all was fair as she.
There were knights, that looked at them lovingly,
But not one of them all was loving as I.

Only, each noble cavalier
Had his throat red-lined from ear to ear;
'T was a collar of merit, I have heard,
Which a Queen upon each had once conferred.
And each lovely lady that oped her lip
Let a little mouse's tail outslip;
'T was the fashion there, I know not why,
But fashions are changing constantly.
From the crescented naphtha lamps each ray
Streamed into a still enchanted blaze; —
And forth from the deep-toned orchestra
That music, that music of other days!

My arm enlaced her winsome waist,
And down the dance we flew:
We flew, we raced: our lips embraced:
And our breath was mingled too.
Round, and round, to a magic sound —
(A wizard waltz to a wizard air!)
Round and round, we whirled, we wound,
In a circle light and fine:
My cheek was fanned by her fragrant hair,
And her bosom beat on mine:
And all the while, in the winding ways,
That music, that music of other days,
With its melodies divine!

The palace clock stands in the hall,
And talks, unheard, of the flight of time:
With a face too pale for a festival
It telleth a tale too sad for rhyme.

The palace clock, with a silver note,
Is chanting the death of the hour that dies.
"What aileth thee? for I see float
A shade into thine eyes."

"Naught aileth me," . . . low murmured she,
"I am faint with the dance, my love,
Give me thine arm: the air is warm:
Lead me unto the grove."

We wandered into the grove. We found
A bower by woodbine woven round.

Upon my breast she leaned her head:
I drew her into the bower apart.
"I swear to thee, my love," she said,
"Thou hast my heart!"

"Ah, leave thy little heart at rest!
For it is so light, I think, so light,
Some wind would blow it away to-night,
If it were not safe in thy breast.
But the wondrous brightness on thine hair
Did never seem more bright:
And thy beauty never looked more fair
Than thy beauty looks to-night:
And this dim hour, and this wild bower,
Were made for our delight:
Here we will stay, until the day,
In yon dark east grows white."

"This may not be," . . . she answered me,
"For I was lately wed
With a diamond ring to an Ogre-king,
And I am his wife," . . . she said.
"My husband is old; but his crown is of gold:
And he hath a cruel eye:
And his arm is long, and his hand is strong,
And his body is seven ells high:
And alas! I fear, if he found us here,
That we both should surely die.

"All day I take my harp, and play
To him on a golden string:
Thorough the weary livelong day
I play to him, and sing:
I sing to him till his white hair
Begins to curl and creep:
And his wrinkles old slowly unfold,
And his brows grow smooth as sleep.
But at night, when he calls for his golden cup,
Into his wine I pour
A juice which he drinks duly up,
And sleeps till the night is o'er.
For one moment I wait: I look at him straight,
And tell him for once how much I detest him:
I have no fear lest he should hear,
The drug he hath drained hath so opprest him.
Then, finger on lip, away I slip,
And down the hills, till I reach the stream:
I call to thee clear, till the boat appear,
And we sail together through dark and dream.
And sweet it is, in this Isle of Fays,
To wander at will through a garden of flowers,
While the flowers that bloom, and the lamps that blaze,
And the very nightingales seem ours!
And sweeter it is, in the winding ways
Of the waltz, while the music falls in showers,
While the minstrel plays, and the moment stays,
And the sweet brief rapture of love is ours!

"But the night is far spent; and before the first rent
In yon dark blue sky overhead,
My husband will wake, and the spell will break,
And peril is near," . . . she said.
"For if he should wake, and not find me,
By bower and brake, thorough bush and tree,
He will come to seek me here;
And the Palace of Fays, in one vast blaze,
Will sink and disappear;
And the nightingales will die in the vales,
And all will be changed and drear!
For the fays and elves can take care of themselves:
They will slip on their slippers, and go:
In their little green cloaks they will hide in the oaks,
And the forests and brakes, for their sweet sakes,
Will cover and keep them, I know.
And the knights, with their spurs, and velvets and furs,
Will take off their heads, each one,
And to horse, and away, as fast as they may,
Over brook, and bramble, and stone;
And each dame of the house has a little dun mouse,
That will whisper her when to be gone;
But we, my love, in this desolate grove,
We shall be left alone;
And my husband will find us, take us and bind us:
In his cave he will lock me up,
And pledge me for spite in thy blood by night
When he drains down his golden cup."

"Thy husband, dear, is a monster, 't is clear,
But just now I will not tarry
Thy choice to dispute — how on earth such a brute
Thou hadst ever the fancy to marry.
For wherefore, meanwhile, are we two here,
In a fairy island under a spell,
By night, in a magical atmosphere,
In a lone enchanted dell,
If we are to say and do no more
Than is said and done by the dull daylight,
In that dry old world, where both must ignore,
To-morrow, the dream of to-night."

Her head drooped on my breast,
Fair foolish little head!
Her lips to mine were prest.
Never a word was said.

If it were but a dream of the night,
A dream that I dreamed in sleep —
Why, then, is my face so white,
And this wound so red and deep?
But whatever it was, it all took place
In a land where never your steps will go,
Though they wander, wherever they will, through space;
In an hour you never will know,
Though you should outlive the crow
That is like to outlive your race.

And if it were but a dream, it broke
Too soon, albeit too late I woke,
Waked by the smart of a sounding stroke
Which has so confused my wits,
That I cannot remember, and never shall,
What was the close of that festival,
Nor how the Palace was shattered to bits:
For all that, just now, I think I know,
Is what is the force of an Ogre's blow,
As my head, by starts and fits,
Aches and throbs; and, when I look round,
All that I hear is the sickening sound
Of the nurse's watch, and the doctor's boots,
Instead of the magical fairy flutes;
And all that I see, in my love's lost place,
Is that gin-drinking hag, with her nut-cracker face,
By the hearth's half-burned out wood:
And the only stream is this stream of blood
That flows from me, red and wide:
Yet still I hear, — as sharp and clear,
In the horrible, horrible silence outside,
The clock that stands in the empty hall,
And talks to my soul of the flight of time;
With a face like a face at a funeral,
Telling a tale too sad for rhyme:
And still I hear, with as little cheer,
In the yet more horrible silence inside,
Chanted, perchance, by elves and fays,
From some far island, out of my gaze,
Where a house has fallen, and some one has died,
That music, that music of other days,
With its minstrelsy undescried!

For Time, which surviveth everything,
And Memory which surviveth Time: —
These two sit by my side, and sing,
A song too sad for rhyme.

THE CANTICLE OF LOVE.

I ONCE heard an angel, by night, in the sky,
Singing softly a song to a deep golden lute:
The polestar, the seven little planets, and I,
To the song that he sung listened mute.
For the song that he sung was so strange and so sweet,
And so tender the tones of his lute's golden strings,
That the Seraphs of Heaven sat husht at his feet,
And folded their heads in their wings.

And the song that he sung by those Seraphs up there
Is called . . . "Love." But the words, I had heard them elsewhere.

For, when I was last in the nethermost Hell,
On a rock 'mid the sulphurous surges, I heard
A pale spirit sing to a wild hollow shell,
And his song was the same, every word.
But so sad was his singing, all Hell to the sound
Moaned, and, wailing, complained like a monster in pain,
While the fiends hovered near o'er the dismal profound,
With their black wings weighed down by the strain.

And the song that was sung by the Lost Ones down there
Is called . . . "Love." But the spirit that sung was Despair.

When the moon sets to-night, I will go down to ocean,
Bare my brow to the breeze, and my heart to its anguish;
And sing till the Siren with pining emotion
(Unroused in her sea-caves) shall languish.

And the Sylphs of the water shall crouch
at my feet,
With their white wistful faces turned
upward to hear,
And the soft Salamanders shall float, in
the heat
Of the ocean volcanoes, more near.

For the song I have learned, all that
listen shall move:
But there 's one will not listen, and that
one I love.

THE PEDLER.

THERE was a man, whom you might see,
Toward nightfall, on the dusty track,
Faring, footsore and wearily —
A strong box on his back.

A speck against the flaring sky,
You saw him pass the line of dates,
The camel-drivers loitering by
From Bagdadt's dusking gates.

The merchants from Bassora stared,
And of his wares would question him,
But, without answer, on he fared
Into the evening dim.

Nor only in the east: but oft
In northern lands of ice and snow,
You might have seen, past field and croft,
That figure faring slow.

His cheek was worn; his back bent double
Beneath the iron box he bore;
And in his walk there seemed such
trouble,
You saw his feet were sore.

You wondered if he ever had
A settled home, a wife, a child:
You marvelled if a face so sad
At any time had smiled.

The cheery housewife oft would fling
A pitying alms, as on he strode,
Where, round the hearth, a rosy ring,
Her children's faces glowed:

In the dark doorway, oft the maid,
Late-lingering on her lover's arm,
Watched through the twilight, half
afraid,
That solitary form.

The traveller hailed him oft, . . . "Good
night:
The town is far: the road is lone:
God speed!" . . . already out of sight,
The wayfarer was gone.

But, when the night was late and still,
And the last star of all had crept
Into his place above the hill,
He laid him down and slept.

His head on that strong box he laid:
And there, beneath the star-cold skies,
In slumber, I have heard it said,
There rose before his eyes

A lovely dream, a vision fair,
Of some far-off, forgotten land,
And of a girl with golden hair,
And violets in her hand.

He sprang to kiss her . . . "Ah! once
more
Return, beloved, and bring with thee
The glory and delight of yore, —
Lost evermore to me!"

Then, ere she answered, o'er his back
There fell a brisk and sudden stroke, —
So sound and resolute a thwack
That, with the blow, he woke . . .

There comes out of that iron box
An ugly hag, an angry crone;
Her crutch about his ears she knocks:
She leaves him not alone:

"Thou lazy vagabond! come, budge,
And carry me again," . . . she says:
"Not half the journey's over . . .
trudge!"
. . . He groans, and he obeys.

Oft in the sea he sought to fling
That iron box. But witches swim:
And wave and wind were sure to bring
The old hag back to him;

Who all the more about his brains
Belabored him with such hard blows,
That the poor devil, for his pains,
Wished himself dead, heaven knows!

Love, is it thy hand in mine? . . . Behold!
I see the crutch uplifted high.
The angry hag prepares to scold.
O, yet we might . . . . . Good by!

A GHOST STORY.

I LAY awake past midnight :
The moon set o'er the snow :
The very cocks, for coldness,
Could neither sleep nor crow.

There came to me, near morning,
A woman pale and fair :
She seemed a monarch's daughter,
By the red gold round her hair.

The ring upon her finger
Was one that well I know :
I knew her fair face also,
For I had loved it so !

But I felt I saw a spirit,
And I was sore afraid ;
For it is many and many a year
Ago, since she was dead.

I would have spoken to her,
But I could not speak, for fear :
Because it was a homeless ghost
That walked beyond its sphere ;

Till her head from her white shoulders
She lifted up : and said . . .
"*Look in ! you'll find I'm hollow.*
Pray do not be afraid !"

SMALL PEOPLE.

THE warm moon was up in the sky,
And the warm summer out on the land.
There trembled a tear from her eye :
There trembled a tear on my hand.

Her sweet face I could not see clear,
For the shade was so dark in the tree :
I only felt touched by a tear,
And I thought that the tear was for me.

In her small ear I whispered a word, —
With her sweet lips she laughed in my face
And, as light through the leaves as a bird,
She flitted away from the place.

Then she told to her sister, the Snake,
All I said ; and her cousin the Toad.
The Snake slipped away to the brake,
The Toad went to town by the road.

The Toad told the Devil's coach-horse,
Who cocked up his tail at the news.
The Snake hissed the secret, of course,
To the Newt, who was changing her shoes.

The Newt drove away to the ball,
And told it the Scorpion and Asp.
The Spider, who lives in the wall,
Overheard it, and told it the Wasp.

The Wasp told the Midge and the Gnat :
And the Gnat told the Flea and the Nit.
The Nit dropped an egg as she sat :
The Flea shrugged his shoulders, and bit.

The Nit and the Flea are too small,
And the Snake slips from under my foot :
I wish I could find 'mid them all
A man, — to insult and to shoot !

METEMPSYCHOSIS.

SHE fanned my life out with her soft little sighs :
She hushed me to death with her face so fair :
I was drunk with the light of her wild blue eyes,
And strangled dumb in her long gold hair.

So now I'm a blesséd and wandering ghost,
Though I cannot quite find out my way up to heaven :
But I hover about o'er the long reedy coast,
In the wistful light of a low red even.

I have borrowed the coat of a little gray gnat :
There's a small sharp song I have learned how to sing :
I know a green place she is sure to be at :
I shall light on her neck there, and sting, and sting.

Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, life never pleased me !
I fly where I list now, and sleep at my ease.
Buzz, buzz, buzz ! the dead only are free.
Yonder's my way now. Give place, if you please.

TO THE QUEEN OF SERPENTS.

I TRUST that never more in this world's shade
Thine eyes will be upon me: never more
Thy face come back to me. For thou hast made
My whole life sore:

And I might curse thee, if thou camest again
To mock me with the memory in thy face
Of days I would had been not. So much pain
Hath made me base—

Enough to wreak the wrath of years of wrong
Even on so frail and weak a thing as thou!
Fare hence, and be forgotten. . . . Sing thy song,
And braid thy brow,

And be beloved, and beautiful, — and be
In beauty baleful still . . . a Serpent Queen
To others not yet curst by kissing thee,
As I have been.

But come not nigh me till my end be near,
And I have turned a dying face toward heaven.
Then, if thou wilt, approach, — and have no fear,
And be forgiven.

Close, if thou wilt, mine eyes, and smooth my hair:
Fond words will come upon my parting breath.
Nor, having desolated life, forbear
Kind offices to death.

BLUEBEARD.

I WAS to wed young Fatima,
As pure as April's snowdrops are,
In whose love lay hid my crooked life,
As in its sheath my scimitar.

Among the hot pomegranate boughs,
At sunset, here alone we sat.
To call back something from that hour
I'd give away my Caliphat.

She broke her song to gaze at me:
Her lips she leaned my lips above . . .
"Why art thou silent all this while,
Lord of my life, and of my love?"

"*Silent I am, young Fatima,*
For silent is my soul in me,
And language will not help the want
Of that which cannot ever be."

"But wherefore is thy spirit sad,
My lord, my love, my life?" . . . she said.
"*Because thy face is wondrous like*
The face of one I knew, that's dead."

"Ah cruel, cruel," cried Fatima,
"That I should not possess the past!
What woman's lips first kissed the lips
Where my kiss lived and lingered last?

"And she that's dead was loved by thee,
That so her memory moves thee yet? . . .
Thy face grows cold and white, as looks
The moon o'er yonder minaret!"

"*Ay, Fatima! I loved her well,*
With all of love's and life's despair,
Or else I had not strangled her,
That night, in her own fatal hair."

FATIMA.

A YEAR ago thy cheek was bright,
As oleander buds that break
The dark of yonder dells by night
Above the lamp-lit lake.

Pale as a snowdrop in Cashmere
Thy face to-night, fair infant, seems.
Ah, wretched child! What dost thou hear
When I talk in my dreams?

GOING BACK AGAIN.

I DREAMED that I walked in Italy
When the day was going down,
By a water that flowed quite silently
Through an old dim-lighted town:

Till I came to a Palace fair to see :
Wide open the windows were :
My love at a window sat, and she
Beckoned me up the stair.

I roamed through many a corridor
And many a chamber of state :
I passed through many an open door,
While the day was growing late :

Till I came to the Bridal Chamber at last,
All dim in the darkening weather.
The flowers at the window were talking fast,
And whispering all together.

The place was so still that I could hear
Every word that they said :
They were whispering under their breath with fear,
For somebody there was dead.

When I came to the little rose-colored room,
From the window there flew a bat.
The window was opened upon the gloom :
My love at the window sat :

She sat with her guitar on her knee,
But she was not singing a note,
For some one had drawn (ah, who could it be ?)
A knife across her throat.

THE CASTLE OF KING MACBETH.

This is the castle of King Macbeth.
And here he feasts — when the day-light wanes,
And the moon goes softly over the heath —
His Earls and Thanes.

A hundred harpers with harps of gold
Harp thorough the night high festival :
And the sound of the music they make is rolled
From hall to hall.

They drink deep healths till the rafters rock
In the Banquet Hall ; and the shout is borne
To the courts outside, where the crowing cock
Is waked ere morn.

And the castle is all in a blaze of light
From cresset, and torch, and sconce : and there
Each warrior dances all the night
With his lady fair.

They dance and sing till the raven is stirred
On the wicked elm-tree outside in the gloom :
And the rustle of silken robes is heard
From room to room.

But there is one room in that castle old,
In a lonely turret where no one goes,
And a dead man sits there, stark and cold,
Whom no one knows.

DEATH-IN-LIFE.

Blest is the babe that dies within the womb.
Blest is the corpse which lies within the tomb.
And blest that death for which this life makes room.

But dreary is the tomb where the corpse lies :
And wretched is the womb where the child dies :
And curst that death which steals this life's disguise.

KING LIMOS.

There once was a wicked, old, gray king —
Long damned, as I have reason to know,
For he was buried (and no bad thing !)
Hundreds of years ago.

His wicked old heart had grown so chilled
That the leech, to warm him, did not shrink
To give him each night a goblet, filled
With a virgin's blood, to drink.

"A splenetic legend," . . . you say, of course !
Yet there may be something in it, too.
Kill, or be killed . . . which choice were the worse ?
I know not. Solve it you.

But even the wolf must have his prey :
And even the gallows will have her food :
And a king, my friend, will have his way,
Though that way may lie through blood.

My heart is hungry, and must be fed ;
My life is empty, and must be filled ;
One is not a Ghoul, to live on the dead :
What then if fresh blood be spilled ?

We follow the way that nature leads.
What 's the very first thing that we learn? To devour.
Each life the death of some other needs
To help it from hour to hour.

From the animalcule that swallows his friends,
Nothing loath, in the wave as it rolls,
To man, as we see him, this law ascends ;
'T is the same in the world of souls.

The law of the one is still to absorb :
To be absorbed is the other's lot : —
The lesser orb by the larger orb,
The weak by the strong . . . why not ?

My want 's at the worst : so why should I spare
(Since just such a thing my want supplies)
This little girl with the silky hair,
And the love in her two large eyes ?

THE FUGITIVE.

There is no quiet left in life,
Not any moment brings me rest :
Forevermore, from shore to shore,
I bear about a laden breast.

I see new lands : I meet new men :
I learn strange tongues in novel places.
I cannot chase one phantom face
That haunts me, spite of newer faces.

For me the wine is poured by night,
And deep enough to drown much sadness ;
But from the cup that face looks up,
And mirth and music turn to madness.

There 's many a lip that 's warm for me :
Many a heart with passion bounding :
But ah, my breast, when closest prest,
Creeps to a cold step near me sounding.

To this dark penthouse of the mind
I lure the bat-winged Sleep in vain ;
For on his wings a dream he brings
That deepens all the dark with pain.

I may write books which friends will praise,
I may win fame, I may win treasure ;
But hope grows less with each success,
And pain grows more with every pleasure.

The draughts I drain to slake my thirst
But fuel more the infernal flame.
There tangs a sting in everything : —
The more I change, the more the same !

A man that flies before the pest,
From wind to wind my course is whirled.
This fly accurst stung Io first,
And drove her wild across the world !

THE SHORE.

Can it be women that walk in the sea-mist under the cliffs there ?
Where, 'neath a briny bow, creaming, advances the lip
Of the foam, and out from the sand-choked anchors, on to the skiffs there,
The long ropes swing through the surge, as it tumbles ; and glitter, and drip.

All the place in a lurid, glimmering, emerald glory,
Glares like a Titan world come back under heaven again :
Yonder, up there, are the steeps of the sea-kings, famous in story ;
But who are they on the beach ? They are neither women, nor men.

Who knows, are they the land's, or the water's, living creatures ?
Born of the boiling sea ? nurst in the seething storms ?

With their woman's hair dishevelled over their stern male features,
Striding, bare to the knee; magnified maritime forms!

They may be the mothers and wives, they may be the sisters and daughters
Of men on the dark mid-seas, alone in those black-coiled hulls,
That toil 'neath yon white cloud, whence the moon will rise o'er the waters
To-night, with her face on fire, if the wind in the evening lulls.

But they may be merely visions, such as only sick men witness
(Sitting as I sit here, filled with a wild regret),
Framed from the sea's misshapen spume with a horrible fitness
To the winds in which they walk, and the surges by which they are wet:—

Salamanders, sea-wolves, witches, warlocks; marine monsters,
Which the dying seaman beholds, when the rats are swimming away,
And an Indian wind 'gins hiss from an unknown isle, and alone stirs
The broken cloud which burns on the verge of the dead, red day,

I know not. All in my mind is confused; nor can I dissever
The mould of the visible world from the shape of my thoughts in me.
The Inward and Outward are fused: and, through them, murmur forever
The sorrow whose sound is the wind, and the roar of the limitless sea.

THE NORTH SEA.

By the gray sand-hills, o'er the cold sea-shore; where, dumbly peering,
Pass the pale-sailed ships, scornfully, silently; wheeling and veering
Swift out of sight again; while the wind searches what it finds never,
O'er the sand-reaches, bays, billows, blown beaches, — homeless forever!
And, in a vision of the bare heaven seen and soon lost again,
Over the rolling foam, out in the mid-seas, round by the coast again,
Hovers the sea-gull, poised in the wind above, o'er the bleak surges,
In the green briny gleam, briefly revealed and gone; . . . fleet, as emerges
Out of the tumult of some brain where memory labors, and fretfully
Moans all the night-long, — a wild wingéd hope, soon fading regretfully.
Here walk the lost Gods o' dark Scandinavia, morning and even;
Faint pale divinities, realmless and sorrowful, exiled from Heaven;
Burthened with memories of old theogonies; each ruined monarchy
Roaming amazed by seas oblivious of ancient fealty.
Never, again at the tables of Odin, in their lost Banquet Hall,
Shall they from golden cups drink, hearing golden harps, harping high festival,
Never praise bright-haired Freya, in Vingolf, for her lost loveliness!
Never, with Ægir, sail round cool moonlit isles of green wilderness!
Here on the lone wind, through the long twilight, when day is waning,
Many a hopeless voice near the night is heard coldly complaining,
Here, in the glimmering darkness, when winds are dropped, and not a seaman sings
From cape or foreland, pause, and pass silently, forms of discrownéd kings,
With sweeping, floating folds of dim garments; wandering in wonder
Of their own aspect; trooping towards midnight; feeling for thunder.
Here, in the afternoon; while, in her father's boat, heavily laden,
Mending the torn nets, sings up the bleak bay the Fisher-Maiden,
I too, forlornly wandering, wandering, see, with the mind's eye,
Shadows beside me, . . . (hearing the wave moan, hearing the wind sigh) . . .
Shadows, and images balefully beautiful, of days departed:

Sounds of faint footsteps, gleams of pale foreheads, make me sad-hearted;
Sad for the lost, irretrievable sweetness of former hours;
Sad with delirious, desolate odors, from faded flowers;
Sad for the beautiful gold hair, the exquisite, exquisite graces
Of a divine face, hopelessly unlike all other faces!

O'er the gray sand-hills (where I sit sullenly, full of black fancies),
Nipt by the sea-wind, drenched by the sea-salt, little wild pansies
Flower, and freshly tremble, and twinkle; sweet sisterhoods,
Lone, and how lovely, with their frail green stems, and dark purple hoods!
Here, even here in the midst of monotonous, fixt desolation,
Nature has touches of tenderness, beauties of young variation;
Where, O my heart, in thy ruined, and desolate, desolate places,
Springs there a floweret, or gleams there the green of a single oasis?
Hidden, it may be perchance, and I know it not . . . hidden yet inviolate,
Pushes the germ of an unconscious rapture in me, like the violet
Which, on the bosom of March, the snows cover and keep till the coming
Of April, the first bee shall find, when he wanders, and welcome it humming.
Teach me, thou North where the winds lie in ambush; the rains and foul weather
Are stored in the house of the storms; and the snow-flakes are garnered together;
Where man's stern, dominate, sovereign intelligence holds in allegiance
Whatever blue Sirius beholds on this Earth-ball, — all seas, and all regions;
The iron in the hill's heart; the spirit in the loadstone; the ice in the poles;
All powers, all dominions; ships; merchandise; armaments; beasts; human souls; . . .
Teach me thy secrets: teach to refrain, to restrain, to be still;
Teach me unspoken, steadfast endurance; — the silence of Will!

A NIGHT IN THE FISHERMAN'S HUT.

PART I.

THE FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTER.

If the wind had been blowing the Devil this way
The midnight could scarcely have grown more unholy,
Or the sea have found secrets more wicked to say
To the toothless old crags it is hiding there wholly.

I love well the darkness. I love well the sound
Of the thunder-drift, howling this way over ocean.
For 't is though as in nature my spirit had found
A trouble akin to its own fierce emotion.

The hoarse night may howl herself silent for me.
When the silence comes, then comes the howling within.

I am drenched to my knees in the surf of the sea,
And wet with the salt bitter rain to the skin.

Let it thunder and lighten! this world's ruined angel
Is but fooled by desire like the frailest of men;
Both seek in hysterics life's awful evangel,
Then both settle down to life's silence again.

Well I know the wild spirits of water and air,
When the lean morrow turns up its cynical gray,
Will, baffled, revert with familiar despair
To their old listless work, in their old helpless way.

Yonder 's the light in the Fisherman's hut:
But the old wolf himself is, I know, off at sea.

And I see through the chinks, though the shutters be shut,
By the firelight that some one is watching for me.

Three years ago, on this very same night,
I walked in a ballroom of perfume and splendor
With a pearl-bedecked lady below the lamplight: —
Now I walk with the wild wind, whose breath is more tender.

Hark! the horses of ocean that crouch at my feet,
They are moaning in impotent pain on the beach!
Lo! the storm-light, that swathes in its blue winding-sheet
That lone desert of sky, where the stars are dead, each!

Holloa, there! open, you little wild girl!
Hush, . . . 't is her soft little feet o'er the floor.
Stay not to tie up a single dark curl,
But quick with the candle, and open the door.

One kiss? . . . there 's twenty! . . . but first, take my coat there,
Salt as a sea-sponge, and dripping all through.
The old wolf, your father, is out in the boat there.
Hark to the thunder! . . . we 're safe, — I and you.

Put on the kettle. And now for the cask
Of that famous old rum of your father's, the king
Would have clawed on our frontier. There, fill me the flask.
Ah, what a quick, little, neat-handed thing!

There 's my pipe. Stuff it with black negro-head.
Soon I shall be in the cloud-land of glory.
Faith, 't is better with you, dear, than 'fore the mast-head,
With such lights at the windows of night's upper story!

Next, over the round open hole in the shutter
You may pin up your shawl, . . . lest a mermaid should peep.
Come, now, the kettle 's beginning to splutter,
And the cat recomposes herself into sleep.

Poor little naked feet, . . . put them up there . . .
Little white foam-flakes! and now the soft head,
Here, on my shoulder; while all the dark hair
Falls round us like sea-weed. What matter the bed

If sleep will visit it, if kisses feel there
Sweet as they feel under curtains of silk?
So, shut your eyes, while the firelight will steal there
O'er the black bear-skin, the arm white as milk!

Meanwhile I 'll tell to you all I remember
Of the old legend, the northern romance
I heard of in Sweden, that snowy December
I passed there, about the wild Lord Rosencrantz.

Then, when you 're tired, take the cards from the cupboard,
Thumbed over by every old thief in our crew,
And I 'll tell you your fortune, you little Dame Hubbard;
My own has been squandered on witches like you.

Knave, King, and Queen, all the villanous pack of 'em,
I know what they 're worth in the game, and have found
Upon all the trump-cards the small mark at the back of 'em,
The Devil's nail-mark, who still cheats us all round.

PART II.

THE LEGEND OF LORD ROSENCRANTZ.

The lamps in the castle hall burn bright,
And the music sounds, and the dancers dance,

And lovely the young Queen looks to-night,
But pale is Lord Rosencrantz.

Lord Rosencrantz is always pale,
But never more deadly pale than now . . .
O, there is a whisper, — an ancient tale, —
A rumor, . . . but who should know?

He has stepped to the daïs. He has taken her hand.
And she gives it him with a tender glance.
And the hautboys sound, and the dancers stand,
And envy Lord Rosencrantz.

That jewelled hand to his lips he prest;
And lightly he leads her towards the dance:
And the blush on the young Queen's cheek confest
Her love for Lord Rosencrantz.

The moon at the mullioned window shone;
There a face and a hand in the moonlight glance;
But that face and that hand were seen of none,
Save only Lord Rosencrantz.

A league aloof in the forest-land
There 's a dead black pool, where a man by chance
. . . Again, again, that beckoning hand!
And it beckons Lord Rosencrantz.

While the young Queen turned to whisper him,
Lord Rosencrantz from the hall was gone;
And the hautboys ceased, and the lamps grew dim,
And the castle clock struck One!

* * * *

It is a bleak December night,
And the snow on the highway gleams by fits:
But the fire on the cottage-hearth burns bright,
Where the little maiden sits.

Her spinning-wheel she has laid aside;
And her blue eyes soft in the firelight glance;
As she leans with love, and she leans with pride,
On the breast of Lord Rosencrantz.

Mother 's asleep, up stairs in bed:
And the black cat, she looks wondrous wise
As she licks her paws in the firelight red,
And glares with her two green eyes:

And the little maiden is half afraid,
And closely she clings to Lord Rosencrantz;
For she has been reading, that little maid,
All day, in an old romance,

A legend wild of a wicked pool
A league aloof in the forest-land,
And a crime done there, and a sinful soul,
And an awful face and hand.

"Our little cottage is bleak and drear,"
Says the little maid to Lord Rosencrantz;
"And this is the loneliest time of the year,
And oft, when the wind, by chance,

"The ivy beats on the window-pane,
I wake to the sound in the gusty nights;
And often, outside, in the drift and rain,
There seem to pass strange sights.

"And O, it is dreary here alone!
When mother 's asleep, in bed, up stairs,
And the black cat, there, to the forest is gone,
— Look at her, how she glares!"

"Thou little maiden, my heart's own bliss,
Have thou no fear, for I love thee well;
And sweetest it is upon nights like this,
When the wind, like the blast of hell,

"Roars up and down in the chimneys old,
And the wolf howls over the distant snow,

To kiss away both the night and the cold
With such kisses as we kiss now."

"Ah! more than life I love thee, dear!"
Says the little maiden with eyes so blue;
"And, when thou art near, I have no fear,
Whatever the night may do.

"But O, it is dreary when thou art away!
And in bed all night I pray for thee:
Now tell me, thou dearest heart, and say,
Dost thou ever pray for me?"

"Thou little maiden, I thank thee much,
And well I would thou shouldst pray for me;
But I am a sinful man, and such
As ill should pray for thee."

Hist! . . . was it a face at the window past?
Or was it the ivy leaf, by chance,
Tapping the pane in the fitful blast,
That startled Lord Rosencrantz?

The little maid, she has seen it plain,
For she shrieked, and down she fell in a swoon:
Mutely it came, and went again,
In the light of the winter moon.

* * * *

The young Queen, — O, but her face was sweet! —
She died on the night that she was wed:
And they laid her out in her winding-sheet,
Stark on her marriage-bed.

The little maiden, she went mad;
But her soft blue eyes still smiled the same,
With ever that wistful smile they had:
Her mother, she died of shame.

The black cat lived from house to house,
And every night to the forest hied;
And she killed many a rat and mouse
Before the day she died.

And do you wish that I should declare
What was the end of Lord Rosencrantz?
Ah! look in my heart, you will find it there,
— The end of the old romance!

PART III.

DAYBREAK.

Yes, you have guessed it. The wild Rosencrantz,
It is I, dear, the wicked one; who but I, maiden?
My life is a tattered and worn-out romance,
And my heart with the curse of the Past hath been laden:

For still, where I wander or linger, forever
Comes a skeleton hand that is beckoning for me;
And still, dogging my footsteps, life's long Never-never
Pursues me, wherever my footsteps may be:

The star of my course hath been long ago set, dear;
And the wind is my pilot, wherever he blows:
He cannot blow from me what I would forget, dear,
Nor blow to me that which I seek for, — repose.

What! if I were the Devil himself, would you cling to me,
Bear my ill humors, and share my wild nights?
Crouch by me, fear me not, stay by me, sing to me,
While the dark haunts us with sounds and with sights?

Follow me far away, pine not, but smile to me,
Never ask questions, and always be gay?
Still the dear eyes meekly turned all the while to me,
Watchful the night through, and patient the day?

What! if this hand, that now strays through your tresses,
Three years ago had been dabbled in gore?
What! if this lip, that your lip now caresses,
A corpse had been pressing but three years before?

Well then, behold!... 'tis the gray light of morning
That breaks o'er the desolate waters ... and hark!
'Tis the first signal shot from my boat gives me warning:
The dark moves away: and I follow the lark.

On with your hat and your cloak! you are mine, child,
Mine and the fiend's that pursues me, henceforth!
We must be far, ere day breaks, o'er the brine, child:
It may be south I go, it may be north.

What! really fetching your hat and your cloak, dear?
Sweet little fool. Kiss me quick now, and laugh!
All I have said to you was but a joke, dear:
Half was in folly, in wantonness half.

PART IV.

BREAKFAST.

Ay, maiden: the whole of my story to you
Was but a deception, a silly romance:
From the first to the last word, no word of it true;
And my name's Owen Meredith, not Rosencrantz.

I never was loved by a Queen, I declare:
And no little maiden for me has gone mad:
I never committed a murder, I swear;
And I probably should have been hanged if I had.

I never have sold to the Devil my soul;
And but small is the price he would give me, I know:
I live much as other folks live, on the whole:
And the worst thing in me's my digestion ... heigh ho!

Let us leave to the night-wind the thoughts which he brings,
And leave to the darkness the powers of the dark;
For my hopes o'er the sea lightly flit, like the wings
Of the curlews that hover and poise round my bark.

Leave the wind and the water to mutter together
Their weird metaphysical grief, as of old,
For day's business begins, and the clerk of the weather
To the powers of the air doth his purpose unfold.

Be you sure those dread Titans, whatever they be,
That sport with this ball in the great courts of Time,
To play practical jokes upon you, dear, and me,
Will never desist from a sport so sublime.

The old Oligarchy of Greece, now abolished,
Were idle aristocrats fond of the arts,
But though thus refined, all their tastes were so polished,
They were turbulent, dissolute gods, without hearts.

They neglected their business, they gave themselves airs,
Read the poets in Greek, sipped their wine, took their rest,
Never troubling their beautiful heads with affairs,
And as for their morals, the least said, the best.

The scandal grew greater and greater: and then
An appeal to the people was formally made.
The old gods were displaced by the suffrage of men,
And a popular government formed in their stead.

But these are high matters of state, — I and you
May be thankful, meanwhile, we have something to eat,
And nothing, just now, more important to do,
Than to sit down at once, and say grace before meat.

You may boil me some coffee, an egg, if it 's handy,
The sea 's rolling mountains just now. I shall wait
For King Neptune's *mollissima tempora fandi*,
Who will presently lift up his curly white pate,

Bid Eurus and Notus to mind their own business,
And make me a speech in Hexameters slow ;
While I, by the honor elated to dizziness,
Shall yield him my offerings, and make him my bow.

A DREAM.

I HAD a quiet dream last night :
For I dreamed that I was dead ;
Wrapped around in my grave-clothes white,
With my gravestone at my head.

I lay in a land I have not seen,
In a place I do not know,
And the grass was deathly, deathly green
Which over my grave did grow.

The place was as still as still could be,
With a few stars in the sky,
And an ocean whose waves I could not see,
Though I heard them moan hard by.

There was a bird in a branch of yew,
Building a little nest.
The stars looked far and very few,
And I lay all at rest.

There came a footstep through the grass,
And a feeling through the mould:
And a woman pale did over me pass,
With hair like snakes of gold.

She read my name upon my grave :
She read my name with a smile.
A wild moan came from a wandering wave,
But the stars smiled all the while.

The stars smiled soft. That woman pale
Over my grave did move,
Singing all to herself a tale
Of one that died for love.

There came a sparrow-hawk to the tree,
The little bird to slay :
There came a ship from over the sea,
To take that woman away.

The little bird I wished to save,
To finish his nest so sweet :
But so deep I lay within my grave
That I could not move my feet.

That woman pale I wished to keep
To finish the tale I heard :
But within my grave I lay so deep
That I could not speak a word.

KING SOLOMON.

KING Solomon stood, in his crown of gold,
Between the pillars, before the altar
In the House of the Lord. And the King was old,
And his strength began to falter,
So that he leaned on his ebony staff,
Sealed with the seal of the Pentegraph.

All of the golden fretted work,
Without and within so rich and rare,
As high as the nest of the building stork,
Those pillars of cedar were : —
Wrought up to the brazen chapiters
Of the Sidonian artificers.

And the King stood still as a carven king,
The carven cedarn beams below,
In his purple robe, with his signet-ring,
And his beard as white as snow,
And his face to the Oracle, where the hymn
Dies under the wing of the cherubim.

The wings fold over the Oracle,
And cover the heart and eyes of God :

The Spouse with pomegranate, lily, and bell,
Is glorious in her abode ;
For with gold of Ophir, and scent of myrrh,
And purple of Tyre, the King clothed her.

By the soul of each slumbrous instrument
Drawn soft through the musical misty air,
The stream of the folk that came and went,
For worship, and praise, and prayer,
Flowed to and fro, and up and down,
And round the King in his golden crown.

And it came to pass, as the King stood there,
And looked on the house he had built, with pride,
That the Hand of the Lord came unaware,
And touched him ; so that he died,
In his purple robe, with his signet-ring
And the crown wherewith they had crowned him king.

And the stream of the folk that came and went
To worship the Lord with prayer and praise,
Went softly ever, in wonderment,
For the King stood there always ;
And it was solemn and strange to behold
That dead king crowned with a crown of gold.

For he leaned on his ebony staff upright ;
And over his shoulders the purple robe ;
And his hair and his beard were both snow-white
And the fear of him filled the globe ;
So that none dared touch him, though he was dead,
He looked so royal about the head.

And the moons were changed : and the years rolled on :
And the new king reigned in the old king's stead :
And men were married and buried anon ;
But the King stood, stark and dead ;
Leaning upright on his ebony staff ;
Preserved by the sign of the Pentegraph.

And the stream of life, as it went and came,
Ever for worship and praise and prayer,
Was awed by the face, and the fear, and the fame
Of the dead king standing there ;
For his hair was so white, and his eyes so cold,
That they left him alone with his crown of gold.

So King Solomon stood up, dead, in the House
Of the Lord, held there by the Pentegraph,
Until out from a pillar there ran a red mouse,
And gnawed through his ebony staff :
Then, flat on his face, the King fell down :
And they picked from the dust a golden crown.*

CORDELIA.

THOUGH thou never hast sought to divine it,
Though to know it thou hast not a care,
Yet my heart can no longer confine it,
Though my lip may be blanched to declare
That I love thee, revere thee, adore thee,
O my dream, my desire, my despair !

Though in life it may never be given
To my heart to repose upon thine ;
Though neither on earth, nor in heaven,
May the bliss I have dreamed of be mine ;
Yet thou canst not forbid me, in distance,
And silence, and long lonely years,
To love thee, despite thy resistance,
And bless thee, despite of my tears.

Ah me, *couldst* thou love me ! . . . Believe me,
How I hang on the tones of thy voice ;
How the least sigh thou sighest can grieve me,
The least smile thou smilest rejoice :

* My knowledge of the Rabbinical legend which suggested this Poem is one among the many debts I owe to my friend Robert Browning. I hope these lines may remind him of hours which his society rendered precious and delightful to me, and which are among the most pleasant memories of my life.

In thy face, how I watch every shade there ;
In thine eyes, how I learn every look ;
How the least sign thy spirit hath made there
My heart reads, and writes in its book !

And each day of my life my love shapes me
From the mien that thou wearest, Beloved.
Thou hast not a grace that escapes me,
Nor a movement that leaves me unmoved.
I live but to see thee, to hear thee ;
I count but the hours where thou art ;
I ask — only ask — to be near thee,
Albeit so far from thy heart.

In my life's lonely galleries never
Will be silenced thy lightest footfall :
For it lingers, and echoes, forever
Unto Memory mourning o'er all.
All thy fair little footsteps are bright
O'er the dark troubled spirit in me,
As the tracks of some sweet water-sprite
O'er the heaving and desolate sea.
And, though cold and unkind be thine eyes,
Yet, unchilled their unkindness below,
In my heart all its love for thee lies,
Like a violet covered by snow.

Little child ! . . . were it mine to watch o'er thee,
To guide, and to guard, and to soothe ;
To shape the long pathway before thee,
And all that was rugged to smooth ;
To kneel at one bedside by night,
And mingle our souls in one prayer ;
And, awaked by the same morning-light,
The same daily duties to share ;

Until Age with his silver dimmed slowly
Those dear golden tresses of thine ;
And Memory rendered thrice holy
The love in this poor heart of mine ;

Ah, never . . . (recalling together,
By one hearth, in our life's winter time,
Our youth, with its lost summer weather,
And our love, in its first golden prime,)
Should those loved lips have cause to record
One word of unkindness from me,
Or my heart cease to bless the least word
Of kindness once spoken by thee !

But, whatever my path, and whatever
The future may fashion for thine,
Thy life, O believe me, can never,
My beloved, be indifferent to mine.
When far from the sight of thy beauty,
Pursuing, unaided, alone,
The path of man's difficult duty
In the land where my lot may be thrown ;
When my steps move no more in the place
Where thou art : and the brief days of yore
Are forgotten : and even my face
In thy life is remembered no more ;
Yet in *my* life will live thy least feature ;
I shall mourn the lost light of thine eyes ;
And on earth there will yet be one nature
That must yearn after thine till it dies.

"YE SEEK JESUS OF NAZARETH WHICH WAS CRUCIFIED : HE IS RISEN : HE IS NOT HERE."

MARK xvi. 6.

If Jesus came to earth again,
And walked, and talked, in field and street,
Who would not lay his human pain
Low at those heavenly feet ?

And leave the loom, and leave the lute,
And leave the volume on the shelf,
To follow Him, unquestioning, mute,
If 't were the Lord himself ?

How many a brow with care o'erworn,
How many a heart with grief o'erladen,
How many a youth with love forlorn,
How many a mourning maiden,

Would leave the baffling earthly prize
Which fails the earthly, weak endeavor,
To gaze into those holy eyes,
And drink content forever !

The mortal hope, I ask with tears
Of Heaven, to soothe this mortal pain, —
The dream of all my darkened years, —
I should not cling to then.

The pride that prompts the bitter jest —
(Sharp styptic of a bleeding heart !)
Would fail, and humbly leave confest
The sin that brought the smart,

If I might crouch within the fold
Of that white robe (a wounded bird);
The face that Mary saw behold,
And hear the words she heard.

I would not ask one word of all
That now my nature yearns to know;—
The legend of the ancient Fall;
The source of human woe:

What hopes in other worlds may hide;
What griefs yet unexplored in this;
How fares the spirit within the wide
Waste tract of that abyss

Which scares the heart (since all we know
Of life is only conscious sorrow)
Lest novel life be novel woe
In death's undawned to-morrow;

I would not ask one word of this,
If I might only hide my head
On that belovéd breast, and kiss
The wounds where Jesus bled.

And I, where'er He went, would go,
Nor question where the path might lead,
Enough to know that, here below,
I walked with God indeed!

His sheep along the cool, the shade,
By the still watercourse He leads,
His lambs upon His breast are laid,
His hungry ones He feeds.

Safe in His bosom I should lie,
Hearing, where'er His steps might be,
Calm waters, murmuring, murmuring by,
To meet the mighty sea.

If this be thus, O Lord of mine,
In absence is Thy love forgot?
And must I, where I walk, repine
Because I see thee not?

If this be thus, if this be thus,
And our poor prayers yet reach Thee, Lord,
Since we are weak, once more to us
Reveal the Living Word!

Yet is my heart, indeed, so weak
My course alone I dare not trace?
Alas! I know my heart must break
Before I see Thy face.

I loved, with all my human soul,
A human creature, here below,
And, though thou bad'st thy sea to roll
Forever 'twixt us two,

And though her form I may not see
Through all my long and lonely life,
And though she never now may be
My helpmate and my wife,

Yet in my dreams her dear eyes shine,
Yet in my heart her face I bear,
And yet each holiest thought of mine
I seem with her to share.

But, Lord, Thy face I never saw,
Nor ever heard Thy human voice:
My life, beneath an iron law,
Moves on without my choice.

No memory of a happier time,
When in Thine arms, perchance, I slept,
In some lost ante-natal clime,
My mortal frame hath kept:

And all is dark — before — behind.
I cannot reach Thee, where Thou art,
I cannot bring Thee to my mind,
Nor clasp Thee to my heart.

And this is why, by night and day,
Still with so many an unseen tear
These lonely lips have learned to pray
That God would spare me here,

While yet my doubtful course I go
Along the vale of mortal years,
By Life's dull stream, that will not flow
As fast as flow my tears,

One human hand, my hand to take:
One human heart, my own to raise:
One loving human voice, to break
The silence of my days.

Saviour, if this wild prayer be wrong,
And what I seek I may not find,
O, make more hard, and stern, and strong,
The framework of my mind!

Or, nearer to me, in the dark
Of life's low hours, one moment stand,
And give me keener eyes to mark
The moving of Thy hand.

TO CORDELIA.

I do not blame thee, that my life
Is lonelier now than even before ;
For hadst thou been, indeed, my wife,
(Vain dream that cheats no more !)

The fate, which from my earliest years
Hath made so dark the path I tread,
Had taught thee too, perchance, such tears
As I have learned to shed.

And that fixed gloom, which souls like mine
Are schooled to wear with stubborn pride,
Had cast too dark a shade o'er thine, —
Hadst thou been by my side.

I blame thee not, that thou shouldst flee
From paths where only weeds have sprung,
Though loss of thee is loss to me
Of all that made youth young.

For 't is not mine, and 't was not thine,
To shape our course as first we strove :
And powers which I could not combine
Divide me from thy love.

Alas ! we cannot choose our lives, —
We can but bear the burthen given.
In vain the feverish spirit strives
With unrelenting heaven.

For who can bid those tyrant stars
The injustice of their laws repeal ?
Why ask who makes our prison bars,
Since they are made of steel ?

The star that rules my darkened hour
Is fixt in reachless spheres on high :
The curse which foils my baffled power
Is scrawled across the sky.

My heart knows all it felt, and feels :
But more than this I shall not know,
Till He that made the heart reveals
Why mine must suffer so.

I only know that, never yet,
My life hath found what others find, —
That peace of heart which will not fret
The fibres of the mind.

I only know that not for me
The human love, the clasp, the kiss ;
My love in other worlds must be, —
Why was I born in this ?

The bee is framed to find her food
In every wayside flower and bell,
And build within the hollow wood
Her own ambrosial cell :

The spider hath not learned her art,
A home in ruined towers to spin ;
But what it seeks, my heart, my heart
Is all unskilled to win.

The world was filled, ere I was born,
With man and maid, with bower and brake,
And nothing but the barren thorn
Remained for me to take :

I took the thorn, I wove it round,
I made a piercing crown to wear :
My own sad hands myself have crowned,
Lord of my own despair.

That which we are, we are. 'T were vain
To plant with toil what will not grow.
The cloud will break, and bring the rain,
Whether we reap or sow.

I cannot turn the thunder-blast,
Nor pluck the levin's lurid root ;
I cannot change the changeless past,
Nor make the ocean mute.

And if the bolt of death must fall
Where, bare of head, I walk my way,
Why let it fall ! I will not call
To bid the Thunderer stay.

'T is much to know, whate'er betide
The pilgrim path I pace alone,
Thou wilt not miss me from thy side
When its brief course is done.

Hadst thou been mine, — when skies were drear
And waves were rough, for thy sweet sake
I should have found in all some fear
My inmost breast to shake :

But now, his fill the blast may blow,
The sea may rage, the thunder roll,
For every path by which I go
Will reach the self-same goal.

Too proud to fly, too weak to cope,
I yet will wait, nor bow my head.
Those who have nothing left to hope,
Have nothing left to dread.

A LETTER TO CORDELIA.

PERCHANCE, on earth, I shall not see thee ever
Ever again: and my unwritten years
Are signed out by that desolating "Never,"
And blurred with tears.

'T is hard, so young — so young as I am still,
To feel forevermore from life depart
All that can flatter the poor human will,
Or fill the heart.

Yet there was nothing in that sweet, and brief,
And perisht intercourse, now closed for me,
To add one thought unto my bitterest grief
Upbraiding thee.

'T is somewhat to have known, albeit in vain,
One woman in this sorrowful bad earth,
Whose very loss can yet bequeathe to pain
New faith in worth.

If I have overrated, in the wild
Blind heat of hope, the sense of aught which hath
From the lost vision of thy beauty smiled
On my lone path,

My retribution is, that to the last
I have o'errated, too, my power to cope
With this fierce thought . . . that life must all be past
Without life's hope;

And I would bless the chance which let me see
Once more the comfort of thy face, although
It were with beauty never born for me
That face should glow.

To see thee — all thou wilt be — loved and loving —
Even though another's — in the years to come —
To watch, once more, thy gracious sweetness moving
Through its pure home, —

Even this would seem less desolate, less drear,
Than never, never to behold thee more —
Never on those belovéd lips to hear
The voice of yore!

These weak words, O my friend, fell not more fast
Than the weak scalding tears that with them fell.
Nor tears, nor words came, when I saw thee last . . .
Enough! . . . Farewell.

Farewell. If that dread Power which fashioned man
To till this planet, free to search and find
The secret of his source as best he can,
In his own mind,

Hath any care, apart from that which moves
Earth's myriads through Time's ages as they roll,
For any single human life, or loves
One separate soul,

May He, whose wisdom portions out for me
The moonless, changeless midnight of the heart,
Still all his softest sunshine save for thee,
Where'er thou art:

And if, indeed, not any human eyes
From human tears be free, — may Sorrow bring
Only to thee her April-rain, whose sighs
Soothe flowers in Spring.

FAILURE.

I HAVE seen those that wore Heaven's armor worsted:
I have heard Truth lie:

Seen Life, beside the founts for which
it thirsted,
Curse God and die :

I have felt the hand, whose touch was
rapture, braiding
Among my hair
Love's choicest flowerets, and have found
how fading
Those garlands were :

I have watched my first and holiest hopes
depart,
One after one :
I have held the hand of Death upon my
heart,
And made no moan :

I have seen her whom life's whole sacrifice
Was made to keep,
Pass coldly by me with a stranger's eyes,
Yet did not weep :

Now even my body fails me ; and my brow
Aches night and day :
I am weak with over-work : how can I
now
Go forth and play ?

What ! now that Youth's forgotten aspirations
Are all no more,
Rest there, indeed, all Youth's glad recreations,
— An untried store ?

Alas, what skills this heart of sad experience,
This frame o'erwrought,
This memory with life 's motion all at
variance,
This aching thought ?

How shall I come, with these, to follow
pleasure
Where others find it ?
Will not their sad steps mar the merriest
measure,
Or lag behind it ?

Still must the man move sadlier for the
dreams
That mocked the boy ;
And, having failed to achieve, must still,
it seems,
Fail to enjoy.

It is no common failure, to have failed
Where man hath given
A whole life's effort to the task assailed—
Spent earth on heaven.

If error and if failure enter here,
What helps repentance ?
Remember this, O Lord, in thy severe
Last sentence !

MISANTHROPOS.

Παντα κονις και παντα γελως και παντα το μηδεν.

DAY's last light is dying out.
All the place grows dim and drear :
See ! the grisly bat 's about.
There is nothing left to fear ·
Little left to doubt.

Not a note of music flits
O'er the slackened harpstrings yonder
From the skeleton that sits
By the broken harp, to ponder
(While the spider knits

Webs in each black socket-hole)
Where is all the music fled.
Music, hath it, then, a goal ? . . .
Broken harp, and brainless head !
Silent song and soul !

Not a light in yonder sky,
Save that single wicked star,
Leering with its wanton eye
Through the shattered window-bar ;
Come to see me die !

All, save this, the monstrous night
Hath erased and blotted bare
As the fool's brain . . . God's last light
Winking at the Fiend's work there,—
Wrong made worse by right !

Gone the voice, the face, of yore !
Gone the dream of golden hair !
Gone the garb that Falsehood wore !
Gone the shame of being bare !
We may close the door.

All the guests are slunk away.
Not a footstep on the stairs !
Not a friend here, left to say
"*Amen*" to a sinner's prayers,
If he cared to pray !

Gone is Friendship's friendliness,
  After Love's fidelity :
Gone is Honor in the mess,
  Spat upon by Charity :
Faith has fled Distress.

Those grim tipstaves at the gate
  Freely may their work begin.
Let them in ! they shall not wait.
  There is little now within
Left for Scorn and Hate.

O, no doubt the air is foul !
  'T is the last lamp spits and stinks,
Shuddering downward in the bowl
  Of the socket, from the brinks.
What 's a burned-out soul ?

Let them all go, unreproved !
  For the source of tears is dried.
What ! . . . One rests ? . . . hath nothing moved
  That pale woman from my side,
Whom I never loved ?

You, with those dim eyes of yours,
  Sadder than all eyes save mine !
That dim forehead which immures
  Such faint helpless griefs, that pine
For such hopeless cures !

Must you love me, spite of loathing ?
  Can't you leave me where I 'm lying ?
O, . . . you wait for our betrothing ?
  I escape you, though, — by dying !
Lay out my death-clothing.

Well I would that your white face
  Were abolisht out of sight,
With the glory and the grace
  Swallowed long ago in night, —
Gone, — without a trace !

Reach me down my golden harp.
  Set it here, beside my knee.
Never fear that I shall warp
  All the chords of ecstasy,
Striking them too sharp !

Crown me with my crown of flowers.
  Faded roses every one !
Pluckt in those long-perisht bowers,
  By the nightshade overrun, —
Fit for brows like ours !

Fill me, now, my golden cup.
  Pour the black wine to the brim !
Till within me, while I sup,
  All the fires, long quenched and dim,
Flare, one moment, up.

I will sing you a last song.
  I will pledge you a last health . . .
Here 's to Weakness seeming strong !
  Here 's to Want that follows Wealth !
Here 's to Right gone wrong !

Curse me now the Oppressor's rod,
  And the meanness of the weak ;
And the fool that apes the nod ;
  And the world at hide and seek
With the wrath of God.

Dreams of man's unvalued good,
  By mankind's unholy means !
Curse the people in their mud !
  And the wicked Kings and Queens,
Lying by the Rood.

Fill ! to every plague . . . and first,
  Love, that breeds its own decay ;
Rotten, ere the blossom burst.
  Next, the friend that slinks away,
When you need him worst.

O the world's inhuman ways !
  And the heartless social lie !
And the coward, cheapening praise !
  And the patience of the sky,
Lighting such bad days !

Curséd be the heritage
  Of the sins we have not sinned !
Curséd be this boasting age,
  And the blind that lead the blind
O'er its creaking stage !

O the vice within the blood,
  And the sin within the sense !
And the fallen angelhood,
  With its yearnings, too immense
To be understood !

Curse the hound with beaten hide,
  When he turns and licks the hand.
Curse this woman at my side !
  And the memory of the land
Where my first love died.

Curséd be the next and most
  (With whatever curse most kills),
Me . . . the man whose soul is lost ;
  Fouled by each of all these ills, —
Filled with death and dust !

Take away the harp of gold,
And the empty wine-cup too.
Lay me out: for I grow cold.
There is something dim in view,
Which must pass untold: —
Something dim, and something vast, —
Out of reach of all I say.
Language ceases . . . husht, aghast.
What am I, to curse or pray?
God succeeds at last!

BOOK VI.—PALINGENESIS.

A PRAYER.

My Saviour, dare I come to Thee,
Who let the little children come?
But I? . . . my soul is faint in me!
I come from wandering to and fro
This weary world. There still his round
The Accuser goes: but Thee I found
Not anywhere. Both joy and woe
Have passed me by. I am too weak
To grieve or smile. And yet I know
That tears lie deep in all I do.
The homeless that are sick for home
Are not so wretched. Ere it break,
Receive my heart; and for the sake,
Not of my sorrows, but of Thine,
Bend down Thy holy eyes on mine,
Which are too full of misery
To see Thee clearly, though they seek.
Yet, if I heard Thy voice say . . .
"Come,"
So might I, dying, die near Thee.
It shames me not, to have passed by
The temple-doors in every street
Where men profaned Thee: but that I
Have left neglected, choked with weeds,
Defrauded of its incense sweet
From holy thoughts and loyal deeds,
The fane Thou gavest me to enshrine
Thee in, this wretched heart of mine.
The Satyr there hath entered in;
The Owl that loves the darkened hour;
And obscene shapes of night and sin
Still haunt, where God designed a bower
For angels.
Yet I will not say
How oft I have aspired in vain,
How toiled along the rugged way,
And held my faith above my pain,
For this Thou knowest. Thou knowest when
I faltered, and when I was strong;
And how from that of other men
My fate was different: all the wrong
Which devastated hope in me:
The ravaged years; the excited heart,
That found in pain its only part
Of love: the master misery
That shattered all my early years,
From which, in vain, I sought to flee:
Thou knowest the long repentant tears,
Thou heard'st me cry against the spheres,
So sharp my anguish seemed to be!
All this Thou knowest. Though I should keep
Silence, Thou knowest my hands were free
From sin, when all things cried to me
To sin. Thou knowest that, had I rolled
My soul in hell-flame fifty-fold,
My sorrow could not be more deep.
Lord! there is nothing hid from Thee.

EUTHANASIA.

(WRITTEN AFTER A SEVERE ILLNESS.)

Spring to the world, and strength to me, returns;
And flowers return, — but not the flowers I knew.
I live: the fire of life within me burns;
But all my life is dead. The land I view
I know not; nor the life which I regain.
Within the hollow of the hand of death
I have lain so long, that now I draw the breath
Of life as unfamiliar, and with pain.

Of life: but not the life which is no more; —
That tender, tearful, warm, and passionate thing;
That wayward, restless, wistful life of yore;
Which now lies, cold, beneath the clasp of Spring,

As last year's leaves: but such a life as seems
A strange new-comer, coy and all-afraid.
No motion heaves the heart where it is laid,
Save when the past returns to me in dreams.

In dreams, like memories of another world:
The beauty, and the passion, and the pain,
The wizardry by which my youth was whirled
Round vain desires, — so violent, yet so vain!
The love which desolated life, yet made
So dear its desolation: and the creeds
Which, one by one, snapped in my hold like reeds,
Beneath the weight of need upon them laid!

For each man deems his own sand-house secure
While life's wild waves are lulled; yet who can say,
If yet his faith's foundations do endure,
It is not that no wind hath blown that way?
Must we, even for their beauty's sake, keep furled
Our fairest creeds, lest earth should sully them,
And take what ruder help chance sends, to stem
The rubs and wrenchings of this boisterous world?

Alas! 't is not the creed that saves the man:
It is the man that justifies the creed:
And each must save his own soul as he can,
Since each is burthened with a different need.
Round each the bandit passions lurk; and, fast
And furious, swarm to strip the pilgrim bare;
Then, oft, in lonely places unaware,
Fall on him, and do murder him at last.

And oft the light of truth, which through the dark
We fetched such toilful compass to detect,
Glares through the broken cloud on the lost bark,
And shows the rock — too late, when all is wrecked!
Not from one watch-tower o'er the deep, alone,
It streams, but lightens there and lightens here
With lights so numberless (like heaven's eighth sphere)
That all their myriad splendors seem but one.

Time was, when it seemed possible to be
(Then, when this shattered prow first felt the foam)
Columbus to some far Philosophy,
And bring, perchance, the golden Indies home.
O siren isles of the enchanted main
Through which I lingered! altars, temples, groves,
Whelmed in the salt sea wave, that rolls and roves
Around each desolated lost domain!

Over all these hath passed the deluge. And,
Saved from the sea, forlornly face to face
With the gaunt ruin of a world, I stand.
But two alone of all that perisht race
Survive to share with me my wanderings;
Doubt and Experience. These my steps attend,
Ever; and oft above my harp they bend,
And, weeping with me, weep among its strings.

Yet, — saved, though in a land unconsecrate
By any memory, it seems good to me
To build an altar to the Lord; and wait
Some token, either from the land or sea,
To point me to my rest, which should be near.
Rude is the work, and simple is my skill;
Yet, if the hand could answer to the will,
This pile should lack not incense. Father, hear

My cry unto thee. Make thy covenant
Fast with my spirit. Bind within Thy bow

"For each man deems his own sand house secure." Page 254.

The whole horizon of my tears. I pant
For Thy refreshing. Bid Thy fountains flow
In this dry desert, where no springs I see.
Before I venture in an unknown land,
Here will I clear the ground on which I stand,
And justify the hope Thou gavest me.

I cannot make quite clear what comes and goes
In fitful light, by waning gleams descried.
The Spirit, blowing where it listeth, blows
Only at times, some single fold aside
Of that great veil which hangs o'er the Unknown:
Yet do the feeble, fleeting lights that fall,
Reveal enough, in part, for hope in all:
And that seems surest which the least is shown.

God is a spirit. It is also said
Man is a spirit. Can I therefore deem
The two in nature separate? The made
Hath in it of the Maker. Hence I seem
A step towards light; — since 't is the property
Of spirit to possess itself in all
It is possest by; — halved yet integral;
One person, various personality.

To say the Infinite is that which lies
Beyond the Finite, . . . were it not to set
A border mark to the immensities?
Far as these mortal senses measure yet
Their little region of the mighty plan,
Through valves of birth and death — are heard forever
The finite steps of infinite endeavor
Moving through Nature and the mind of man.

If man, — the finite spirit, — in infinity
Alone can find the truth of his ideal,
Dare I not deem that infinite Divinity
Within the finite must assume the real?
For what so feverish fancy, reckless hurled
Through a ruined brain, did ever yet descry
A symbol sad enough to signify
The conscious God of an unconscious world?

Wherefore, thus much perceived, to recognize
In God, the infinite spirit of Unity,
In man, the finite spirit, here implies
An interchanged perception; — Deity
Within humanity made manifest:
Not here man lonely, there a lonely God;
But, in all paths by human nature trod,
Infinity in Finity exprest.

This interchange, upon man's part, I call
Religion: revelation on the part
Of Deity: wherefrom there seems to fall
'T is consequence (the point from which I start)
If God and man be one (a unity
Of which religion is the human side)
This must in man's religion be descried,
A consciousness and a reality.

Whilst man in nature dwells, his God is still
In nature; thence, in time, there intervenes
The Law: he learns to fortify his will
Against his passions, by external means:
And God becomes the Lawgiver: but when
Corruption in the natural state we see,
And in the legal hopeless tyranny,
We seem to need (if needed not till then)

That which doth uplift nature, and yet makes
More light the heavy letter of the law.
Then for the Perfect the Imperfect aches,
Till love is born upon the deeps of awe.
Yet what of this, . . . that God in man may be,
And man, though mortal, of a race divine,
If no assurance lives which may incline
The heart of man to man's divinity?

"There is no God" . . . the Fool saith — to his *heart*,
Yet shapes a godhead from his *intellect*.
Is mind than heart less human, . . . that we part
Thought from affection, and from mind erect
A deity merely intellectual?
If God there be, devoid of sympathy
For man, he is not man's divinity.
A God unloving were no God at all.

This felt, . . . I ask not . . . "What is
God?" but "What
Are my relations with Him?" this
alone
Concerns me now: since, if I know this
not,
Though I should know the sources of
the sun,
Or what within the hot heart of the earth
Lulls the soft spirit of the fire, although
The mandate of the thunder I should
know,
To me my knowledge would be nothing
worth.

What message, or what messenger to
man?
Whereby shall revelation reach the
soul?
For who, by searching, finds out God?
How can
My utmost steps, unguided, gain the
goal
Of necessary knowledge? It is clear
I cannot reach the gates of heaven,
and knock
And enter: though I stood upon the
rock
Like Moses, God must speak ere I can
hear,

And touch me ere I feel him. He must
come
To me (I cannot join Him in the cloud),
Stand at the dim doors of my mortal
home;
Lift the low latch of life; and enter,
bowed
Unto this earthly roof; and sit within
The circle of the senses; at the hearth
Of the affections; be my guest on earth,
Loving my love, and sorrowing in my
sin.

Since, though I stripped Divinity, in
thought,
From passion, which is personality,
My God would still be human: though
I sought
In the bird's wing or in the insect's
eye,
Rather than in this broken heart of mine,
His presence, human still: human
would be
All human thought conceives. Humanity,
Being less human, is not more divine.

The soul, then, cannot stipulate or refuse
The fashion of the heavenly embassy.
Since God is here the speaker, He must
choose
The words He wills. Already I descry
That God and man are one, divided here,
Yet reconcilable. One doubt survives.
There is a dread condition to men's
lives:
We die: and, from its death, it would
appear

Our nature is not one with the divine.
Not so. The Man-God dies; and by
his death
Doth with his own immortal life combine
The spirit pining in this mortal breath.
Who from himself himself did alienate
That he, returning to himself, might
pave
A pathway hence, to heaven from the
grave,
For man to follow — through the heavenly gate.

Wert thou, my Christ, not ignorant of
grief?
A man of sorrows? Not for sorrow's sake
(Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief!)
Beneath the thorns did thy pure forehead ache:
But that in sorrow only, unto sorrow,
Can comfort come; in manhood only,
man
Perceive man's destiny. In Nature's
plan
Our path is over Midnight to To-morrow.

And so the Prince of Life, in dying, gave
Undying life to mortals. Once he
stood
Among his fellows, on this side the grave,
A man, perceptible to flesh and blood:
Now, taken from our sight, he dwells no
less
Within our mortal memory and
thought;
The mystery of all he was, and wrought,
Is made a part of general consciousness.

And in this consciousness I reach repose.
Spent with the howling main and
desert sand
Almost too faint to pluck the unfading
rose
Of peace, that bows its beauty to my
hand.

Here Reason fails, and leaves me; my pale guide
Across the wilderness — by a stern command,
Shut out, like Moses, from the Promist Land.
Touching its own achievement, it hath died.

Ah yet! I have but wrung the victory
From Thought! Not passionless will be my path.
Yet on my life's pale forehead I can see
The flush of squandered fires. Passion hath
Yet, in the purpose of my days, its place.
But changed in aspect: turned unto the East,
Whence grows the dayspring from on high, at least
A finer fervor trembles on its face.

THE SOUL'S SCIENCE.

Can History prove the truth which hath
Its record in the silent soul?
Or Mathematics mete the path
Whereby the spirit seeks its goal?

Can Love of aught but Love inherit
The blessing which is born of Love?
The spirit knoweth of the spirit:
The soul alone the soul can prove.

The eye to see: the ear to hear:
The working hand to help the will:
To every sense his separate sphere:
And unto each his several skill.

The ear to sight, the eye to sound,
Is callous: unto each is given
His lorddom in his proper bound.
The soul, the soul to find out heaven!

There is a glory veiled to sight;
A voice which never ear hath heard;
There is a law no hand can write,
Yet stronger than the written word.

And hast thou tidings for my soul,
O teacher? to my soul intrust
Alone the purport of thy scroll:
Or vex me not with learnéd dust.

A PSALM OF CONFESSION.

Full soon doth Sorrow make her covenant
With Life; and leave her shadow in the door:
And all those future days, for which we pant,
Do come in mourning for the days of yore.
Still through the world gleams Memory seeking Love,
Pale as the torch which grieving Ceres bore,
Seeking Proserpina, on that dark shore
Where only phantoms through the twilight move.

The more we change, the more is all the same,
Our last grief was a tale of other years
Quite outworn, till to our own hearts it came.
Wishes are pilgrims to the Vale of Tears.
Our brightest joys are but as airy shapes
Of cloud, that fade on evening's glimmering slope;
And disappointment hawks the hovering hope
Forever pecking at the painted grapes.

Why can we not one moment pause, and cherish
Love, though love turn to tears? or for hope's sake
Bless hope, albeit the thing we hope may perish?
For happiness is not in what we take,
But what we give. What matter though the thing
We cling to most should fail us? dust to dust,
It is the *feeling* for the thing, — the trust
In beauty somewhere, to which souls should cling.

My youth has failed, if failure lies in aught
The warm heart dreams, or which the working hand
Is set to do. I have failed in aidless thought,
And steadfast purpose, and in self-command.

I have failed in hope, in health, in love: failed in the word,
And in the deed too I have failed. Ah yet,
Albeit with eyes from recent weepings wet,
Sing thou, my Soul, thy psalm unto the Lord!

The burthen of the desert and the sea!
The burthen of the vision in the vale!
My threshing-floor, my threshing-floor! ah me,
Thy wind hath strewn my corn, and spoiled the flail!
The burthen of Dumah and of Dedanim!
What of the night, O watchman, of the night?
The glory of Kedar faileth: and the might
Of mighty men is minishéd and dim.

The morning cometh, and the night, he cries.
The watchman cries the morning, too, is nigher.
And, if ye would inquire, lift up your eyes,
Inquire of the Lord, return, inquire!
I stand upon the watchtower all day long:
And all the night long I am set in ward.
Is it thy feet upon the mountains, Lord?
I sing against the darkness: hear my song!

The majesty of Kedar hath been spoiled:
Bound are the arrows: broken is the bow.
I come before the Lord with garments soiled.
The ashes of my life are on my brow.
Take thou thy harp, and go about the city.
O daughter of Desire, with garments torn:
Sing many songs, make melody, and mourn,
That thou may'st be remembered unto pity.

Just, awful God! here at thy feet I lay
My life's most precious offering: dearly bought,
Thou knowest with what toil by night and day:
Thou knowest the pain, the passion, and the thought.
I bring thee my youth's failure. I have spent
My youth upon it. All I have is here.
Were it worth all it is not, price more dear
Could I have paid for its accomplishment?

Yet it is much. If I could say to thee,
"Acquit me, Judge; for I am thus, and thus;
And have achieved — even so much," — should I be
Thus wholly fearless and impetuous
To rush into thy presence? I might weigh
The little done against the undone much:
My merit with thy mercy: and, as such,
Haggle with pardon for a price to pay.

But now the fulness of its failure makes
My spirit fearless; and despair grows bold.
My brow, beneath its sad self-knowledge, aches.
Life's presence passes Thine a thousand-fold
In contemplated terror. Can I lose
Aught by that desperate temerity
Which leaves no choice but to surrender Thee
My life without condition? Could I choose

A stipulated sentence, I might ask
For ceded dalliance to some cherisht vice:
Or half-remission of some desperate task:
Now, all I have is hateful. What is the price?
Speak, Lord! I hear the Fiend's hand at the door.
Hell's slavery or heaven's service is it the choice?
How can I palter with the terms? O voice,
Whence do I hear thee . . . "Go: and sin no more"?

No more, no more? But I have kist dead white
The cheek of Vice. No more the harlot hides

Her loathsomeness of lineament from my sight.
No more within my bosom there abides
Her poisoned perfume. O, the witch's mice
Have eat her scarlet robe and diaper,
And she fares naked! Part from her — from her?
Is this the price, O Lord, is this the price?

Yet, though her web be broken, bonds, I know,
Slow custom frames in the strong forge of time,
Which outlast love, and will not wear with woe,
Nor break beneath the cognizance of crime.
The witch goes bare. But he, — the father fiend,
That roams the unthrifty furrows of my days,
Yet walks the field of life; and, where he strays,
The husbandry of heaven for hell is gleaned.

Lulls are there in man's life which are not peace.
Tumults which are not triumphs. Do I take
The pause of passion for the fiend's decease?
This frost of grief hath numbed the drowsing snake;
Which yet may wake, and sting me in the heat
Of new emotions. What shall bar the door
Against the old familiar, that of yore
Came without call, and sat within my seat?

When evening brings its dim grim hour again,
And hell lets loose its dusky brood awhile,
Shall I not find him in the darkness then?
The same subservient and yet insolent smile?
The same indifferent ignominious face?
The same old sense of household horror, come
Like a tame creature, back into its home?
Meeting me, haply, in my wonted place,
With the loathed freedom of an unloved mate,
Or crouching on my pillow as of old?
Knowing I hate him, impotent in hate!
Therefore more subtle, strenuous, and bold.
Thus ancient habit will usurp young will,
And each new effort rivet the old thrall.
No matter! those who climb must count to fall,
But each new fall will prove them climbing still.

O wretched man! the body of this death
Which, groaning in the spirit, I yet bear
On to the end (so that I breathe the breath
Of its corruption, even though breathing prayer),
What shall take from me? Must I drag forever
The cold corpse of the life which I have killed
But cannot bury? Must my heart be filled
With the dry dust of every dead endeavor?

For often, at the mid of the long night,
Some devil enters into the dead clay,
And gives it life unnatural in my sight.
The dead man rises up; and roams away,
Back to the mouldered mansions of the Past:
And lights a lurid revel in the halls
Of vacant years; and lifts his voice, and calls,
Till troops of phantoms gather round him fast.

Frail gold-haired corpses, in whose eyes there lives
A strange regret too wild to let them rest:
Crowds of pale maidens, who were never wives
And infants that all died upon the breast
That suckled them. And these make revelry
Mingled with wailing all the midnight through,
Till the sad day doth with stern light renew
The toiling land, and the complaining sea.

Full well I know that in this world of ours
The dreadful Commonplace succeeds all change;
We catch at times a gleam of flying powers
That pass in storm some windy mountain range:
But, while we gaze, the cloud returns o'er all.
And each, to guide him up the devious height,
Must take, and bless, whatever earthly light
From household hearths, or shepherd fires, may fall.

This wave, that groans and writhes upon the beach,
To-morrow will submit itself to calm;
That wind that rushes, moaning, out of reach,
Will die anon beneath some breathless palm;
These tears, these sighs, these motions of the soul,
This inexpressible pining of the mind,
The stern indifferent laws of life shall bind,
And fix forever in their old control.

Behold this half-tamed universe of things!
That cannot break, nor wholly bear, its chain.
Its heart by fits grows wild: it leaps, it springs;
Then the chain galls, and kennels it again.
If man were formed with all his faculties
For sorrow, I should sorrow for him less.
Considering a life so brief, the stress
Of its short passion I might well despise:

But all man's faculties are for delight;
But all man's life is compassed with what seems
Framed for enjoyment: but from all that sight
And sense reveal a magic murmur streams
Into man's heart, which says, or seems to say,
"Be happy!" . . . and the heart of man replies,
"Leave happiness to brutes: I would be wise:
Give me, not peace, but science, glory, art."

Therefore, age, sickness, and mortality
Are but the lightest portion of his pain:
Therefore, shut out from joy, incessantly
Death finds him toiling at a task that's vain.
I weep the want of all he pines to have:
I weep the loss of all he leaves behind:—
Contentment, and repose, and peace of mind,
Pawned for the purchase of a little grave:

I weep the hundred centuries of time;
I weep the millions that have squandered them
In error, doubt, anxiety, and crime,
Here, where the free birds sing from leaf and stem:
I weep . . . but what are tears? What I deplore
I knew not, half a hundred years ago:
And half a hundred years from hence, I know
That what I weep for I shall know no more.

The spirit of that wide and leafless wind
That wanders o'er the uncompanioned sea,
Searching for what it never seems to find,
Stirred in my hair, and moved my heart in me,
To follow it, far over land and main:
And everywhere over this earth's scarred face
The footsteps of a God I seemed to trace;
But everywhere steps of a God in pain.

If, haply, he that made this heart of mine,
Himself in sorrow walked the world erewhile,
What then am I, to marvel or repine
That I go mourning ever in the smile
Of universal nature, searching ever
The phantom of a joy which here I miss?
My heart inhabits other worlds than this,
Therefore my search is here a vain endeavor.

Methought, . . . (it was the midnight of my soul,
Dead midnight) that I stood on Calvary:

I found the cross, but not the Christ. The whole
Of heaven was dark : and I went bitterly
Weeping, because I found him not. Methought, . . .
(It was the twilight of the dawn and mist)
I stood before the sepulchre of Christ :
The sepulchre was vacant, void of aught

Saving the cere-clothes of the grave, which were
Upfolden straight and empty : bitterly
Weeping I stood, because not even there
I found him. Then a voice spake unto me,
"Whom seekest thou? Why is thy heart dismayed?
Jesus of Nazareth, he is not here :
Behold, the Lord is risen. Be of cheer :
Approach, behold the place where he was laid."

And while he spake, the sunrise smote the world.
"Go forth, and tell thy brethren," spake the voice ;
"The Lord is risen." Suddenly unfurled,
The whole unclouded Orient did rejoice
In glory. Wherefore should I mourn that here
My heart feels vacant of what most it needs?
Christ is arisen! . . . the cere-clothes and the weeds
That wrapped him lying in this sepulchre

Of earth, he hath abandoned ; being gone
Back into heaven, where we too must turn
Our gaze to find him. Pour, O risen Sun
Of Righteousness, the light for which I yearn
Upon the darkness of this mortal hour,
This tract of night in which I walk forlorn :
Behold the night is now far spent. The morn
Breaks, breaking from afar through a night shower.

REQUIESCAT.

I SOUGHT to build a deathless monument
To my dead love. Therein I meant to place
All precious things, and rare : as Nature blent
All single sweetnesses in one sweet face.
I could not build it worthy her mute merit,
Nor worthy her white brows and holy eyes,
Nor worthy of her perfect and pure spirit,
Nor of my own immortal memories.
But, as some rapt artificer of old,
To enshrine the ashes of a virgin saint,
Might scheme to work with ivory, and fine gold,
And carven gems, and legended and quaint
Seraphic heraldries ; searching far lands,
Orient and occident, for all things rare,
To consecrate the toil of reverent hands,
And make his labor, like her virtue, fair ;
Knowing no beauty beautiful as she,
And all his labor void, but to beguile
A sacred sorrow ; so I worked. Ah, see
Here are the fragments of my shattered pile!
I keep them, and the flowers that sprang between
Their broken workmanship — the flowers and weeds!
Sleep soft among the violets, O my Queen, —
Lie calm among my ruined thoughts and deeds.

EPILOGUE.

PART I.

CHANGE without term, and strife without result,
Persons that pass, and shadows that remain,
One strange, impenetrable, and occult
Suggestion of a hope, that's hoped in vain,
Behold the world man reigns in! His delight
Deceives ; his power fatigues ; his strength is brief ;

Even his religion presupposes grief,
His morning is not certain of the night.

I have beheld, without regret, the trunk,
Which propped three hundred summers on its boughs,
Which housed, of old, the merry bird, and drunk
The divine dews of air, and gave carouse
To the free winds of heaven, lie overthrown
Amidst the trees which its own fruitage bore.
Its promise is fulfilled. It is no more,
But it hath been. Its destiny is done.

But the wild ash, that springs above the marsh!
Strong and superb it rises o'er the wild.
Vain energy of being! For the harsh
And fetid ooze already hath defiled
The roots whose sap it lives by. Heaven doth give
No blessing to its boughs. The humid wind
Rots them. The vapors warp them. All declined,
Its life hath ceased, ere it hath ceased to live.

Child of the waste, and nursling of the pest!
A kindred fate hath watched and wept thine own.
Thine epitaph is written in my breast.
Years change. Day treads out day. For me alone
No change is nurst within the brooding bud.
Satiety I have not known, and yet,
I wither in the void of life, and fret
A futile time, with an unpeaceful blood.

The days are all too long, the nights too fair,
And too much redness satiates the rose.
O blissful season! blest and balmy air!
Waves! moonlight! silence! years of lost repose!
Bowers and shades that echoed to the tread
Of young Romance! birds that, from woodland bars,
Sang, serenading forth the timid stars!
Youth! beauty! passion! whither are ye fled?
I wait, and long have waited, and yet wait
The coming of the footsteps which ye told
My heart to watch for. Yet the hour is late,
And ye have left me. Did they lie, of old,
Your thousand voices prophesying bliss?
That troubled all the current of a fate
Which else might have been peaceful! I await
The thing I have not found, yet would not miss.

To face out childhood, and grow up to man,
To make a noise, and question all one sees,
The astral orbit of a world to span,
And, after a few days, to take one's ease
Under the graveyard grasses, — this, my friend,
Appears to me a thing too strange but what
I wish to know its meaning. I would not
Depart before I have perceived the end.

And I would know what, here below the sun,
He is, and what his place, that being which seems
The end of all means, yet the means of none;
Who searches and combines, aspires and dreams;
Seeking new things with ever the same hope,
Seeking new hopes in ever the same thing;
A king without the powers of a king,
A beggar with a kingdom in his scope;

Who only sees in what he hath attained
The means whereby he may attain to more;
Who only finds in that which he hath gained
The want of what he did not want before;
Whom weakness strengthens; who is soothed by strife;
Who seeks new joys to prize the absent most;
Still from illusion to illusion tost,
Himself the great illusion of his life!

Why is it, all deep emotion makes us sigh
To quit this world? What better thing than death
Can follow after rapture? "Let us die!"
This is the last wish on the lover's breath.
If thou wouldst live, content thee. To enjoy
Is to begin to perish. What is bliss,
But transit to some other state from this?
That which we live for must our life destroy.

Hast thou not ever longed for death? If not,
Not yet thy life's experience is attained.
But if thy days be favored, if thy lot
Be easy, if hope's summit thou hast gained,
Die! Death is the sole future left to thee.
The knowledge of this life is bound, for each,
By his own powers. Death lies between our reach
And all which, living, we have lived to be.

Death is no evil, since it comes to all.
For evil is the exception, not the law.
What is it in the tempest that doth call
Our spirits down its pathways? or the awe
Of that abyss and solitude beneath
High mountain passes, which doth aye attract
Such strange desire? or in the cataract?
The sea? It is the sentiment of death.

If life no more than a mere seeming be,
Away with the imposture! If it tend
To nothing, and to have lived seemingly
Prove to be vain and futile in the end,
Then let us die, that we may really live,
Or cease to feign to live. Let us possess
Lasting delight, or lasting quietness.
What life desires, death, only death, can give.

Where are the violets of vanisht years?
The sunsets Rachel watched by Laban's well?
Where is Fidele's face? where Juliet's tears?
There comes no answer. There is none to tell
What we go questioning, till our mouths are stopt
By a clod of earth. Ask of the plangent sea,
The wild wind wailing through the leafless tree,
Ask of the meteor from the midnight dropt!

Come, Death, and bring the beauty back to all!
I do not seek thee, but I will not shun.
And let thy coming be at even-fall,
Thy pathway through the setting of the sun.
And let us go together, I with thee,
What time the lamps in Eden bowers are lit,
And Melancholy, all alone, doth sit
By the wide marge of some neglected sea.

PART II.

One hour of English twilight once again!
Lo! in the rosy regions of the dew
The confines of the world begin to wane,
And Hesper doth his trembling lamp renew.
Now is the inauguration of the night!
Nature's release to wearied earth and skies!
Sweet truce of Care! Labor's brief armistice!
Best, loveliest interlude of dark and light!

The rookery, babbling in the sunken wood;
The watchdog, barking from the distant farm,
The dim light fading from the hornéd flood,
That winds the woodland in its silver arm;
The massed and immemorial oaks, whose leaves
Are husht in yonder heathy dells below;
The fragrance of the meadows that I know;
The bat, that now his wavering circle weaves

Around these antique towers, and case-
ments deep
That glimmer, through the ivy and
the rose,
To the faint moon, which doth begin to
creep
Out of the inmost heart o' the heavens'
repose,
To wander, all night long, without a
sound,
Above the fields my feet oft wandered
once;
The larches tall and dark, which do
ensconce
The little churchyard, in whose hallowed
ground

Sleep half the simple friends my child-
hood knew:
All, all the sounds and sights of this
blest hour,
Sinking within my heart of hearts, like
dew,
Revive that so long parcht and droop-
ing flower
Of youth, the world's hot breath for
many years
Hath burned and withered; till once
more, once more,
The revelation and the dream of yore
Return to solace these sad eyes with
tears!

Where now, alone, a solitary man,
I pace once more the pathways of my
home,
Light-hearted, and together, once we
ran,
I, and the infant guide that used to
roam
With me, the meads and meadow-banks
among,
At dusk and dawn. How light those
little feet
Danced through the dancing grass
and waving wheat,
Where'er, far off, we heard the cuckoo's
song!

I know now, little Ella, what the flow-
ers
Said to you then, to make your cheek
so pale;
And why the blackbird in our laurel
bowers
Spake to you, only; and the poor,
pink snail
Feared less your steps than those of the
May-shower.
It was not strange these creatures
loved you so,
And told you all. 'T was not so long
ago
You were, yourself, a bird, or else a
flower.

And, little Ella, you were pale, because
So soon you were to die. I know that
now.
And why there ever seemed a sort of
gauze
Over your deep blue eyes, and sad
young brow.
You were too good to grow up, Ella,
you,
And be a woman such as I have
known!
And so upon your heart they put a
stone,
And left you, dear, amongst the flowers
and dew.

God's will is good. He knew what
would be best.
I will not weep thee, darling, any
more;
I have not wept thee; though my heart,
opprest
With many memories, for thy sake is
sore.
God's will is good, and great His wisdom
is.
Thou wast a little star, and thou didst
shine
Upon my cradle; but thou wast not
mine,
Thou wast not mine, my darling; thou
art His.

My morning star! twin sister of my
soul!
My little elfin friend from Fairy-Land!
Whose memory is yet innocent of the
whole
Of that which makes me doubly need
thy hand,
Thy little guiding hand so soon with-
drawn!
Here where I find so little like to
thee.
For thou wert as the breath of dawn
to me,
Starry, and pure, and brief as is the
dawn.

"Around these antique towers that glimmer to the moon." Page 264.

Thy knight was I, and thou my Fairy Queen.
('T was in the days of love and chivalry !)
And thou didst hide thee in a bower of green.
But thou so well hast hidden thee, that I
Have never found thee since. And thou didst set
Many a task, and quest, and high emprise,
Ere I should win my guerdon from thine eyes,
So many, and so many, that not yet

My tasks are ended or my wanderings o'er.
But some day thou wilt send across the main
A magic bark, and I shall quit this shore
Of care, and find thee, in thy bower, again ;
And thou wilt say, "My brother, hast thou found
Our home, at last ?" . . . Whilst I, in answer, Sweet,
Shall heap my life's last booty at thy feet,
And bare my breast with many a bleeding wound.

The spoils of time ! the trophies of the world !
The keys of conquered towns, and captived kings ;
And many a broken sword, and banner furled ;
The heads of giants, and swart Soldan's rings ;
And many a maiden's scarf ; and many a wand
Of baffled wizard ; many an amulet ;
And many a shield, with mine own heart's blood wet ;
And jewels, dear, from many a distant land !

God's will is good. He knew what would be best.
I thought last year to pass away from life.
I thought my toils were ended, and my quest
Completed, and my part in this world's strife
Accomplisht. And, behold ! about me now
There rest the gloom, the glory, and the awe
Of a new martyrdom, no dreams foresaw ;
And the thorn-crown hath blossomed on my brow.

A martyrdom, but with a martyr's joy !
A hope I never hoped for ! and a sense
That nothing henceforth ever can destroy : —
Within my breast the serene confidence
Of mercy in the misery of things ;
Of meaning in the mystery of all ;
Of blessing in whatever may befall ;
Of rest predestined to all wanderings.

How sweet, with thee, my sister, to renew,
In lands of light, the search for those bright birds
Of plumage so ethereal in its hue,
And music sweeter than all mortal words,
Which some good angel to our childhood sent
With messages from Paradisal flowers,
So lately left, the scent of Eden bowers
Yet lingered in our hair, where'er we went !

Now, they are all fled by, this many a year,
Adown the viewless valleys of the wind,
And never more will cross this hemisphere,
Those birds of passage ! Never shall I find,
Dropt from the flight, you followed, dear, so far
That you will never come again, I know,
One plumelet on the paths by which I go,
Missing thy light there, O my morning star !

Soft, over all, doth ancient twilight cast
Her dim gray robe, vague as futurity,
And sad and hoary as the ghostly past,
Till earth assumes invisibility.
I hear the night-bird's note, wherewith she starts
The bee within the blossom from his dream.
A light, like hope, from yonder pane doth beam,
And now, like hope, it silently departs.

Hush! from the clock within yon dark church spire,
Another hour broke, clanging, out of time,
And passed me, throbbing like my own desire,
Into the seven-fold heavens. And now, the chime
Over the vale, the woodland, and the river,
More faint, more far, a quivering echo, strays
From that small twelve-houred circle of our days,
And spreads, and spreads, to the great round Forever.

Pensive, the sombre ivied porch I pass.
Through the dark hall, the sound of my own feet
Pursues me, like the ghost of what I was,
Into this silent chamber, where I meet
From wall to wall the fathers of my race;
The pictures of the past from wall to wall;
Wandering o'er which, my wistful glances fall,
To sink, at last, on little Ella's face.

This is my home. And hither I return,
After much wandering in the ways of men,
Weary but not outworn. Here, with her urn
Shall Memory come, and be my denizen.
And blue-eyed Hope shall through the window look,
And lean her fair child's face into the room,
What time the hawthorn buds anew, and bloom
The bright forget-me-nots beside the brook.

Father of all which is, or yet may be,
Ere to the pillow which my childhood prest
This night restores my troubled brows, by Thee
May this, the last prayer I have learned, be blest!
Grant me to live that I may need from life
No more than life hath given me, and to die
That I may give to death no more than I
Have long abandoned. And, if toil and strife

Yet in the portion of my days must be,
Firm be my faith, and quiet be my heart!
That so my work may with my will agree,
And strength be mine to calmly fill my part
In Nature's purpose, questioning not the end.
For love is more than raiment or than food.
Shall I not take the evil with the good?
Blesséd to me be all which thou dost send!

Nor blest the least, recalling what hath been,
The knowledge of the evil I have known
Without me, and within me. Since, to lean
Upon a strength far mightier than my own
Such knowledge brought me. In whose strength I stand,
Firmly upheld, even though, in ruin hurled,
The fixed foundations of this rolling world
Should topple at the waving of Thy hand.

PART III.

Hail thou! sole Muse that, in an age of toil,
Of all the old Uranian sisterhood,
Art left to light us o'er the furrowed soil
Of this laborious star! Muse, unsubdued
By that strong hand which hath in ruin razed
The temples of dread Jove! Muse most divine,
Albeit but ill by these pale lips of mine,
In days degenerate, first named and praised!

Now the high airy kingdoms of the day
Hyperion holds not. The disloyal seas

Have broken from Poseidon's purple sway.
Through Heaven's harmonious golden palaces
No more the silver-sandalled messengers
Slide to sweet airs. Upon Olympus' brow
The gods' great citadel is vacant now.
And not a lute to Love in Lesbos stirs.

But thou wert born not on the Forkéd Hill,
Nor fed from Hybla's hives by Attic bees,
Nor on the honey Cretan oaks distil,
Or once distilled, when gods had homes in trees,
And young Apollo knew thee not. Yet thou
With Ceres wast, when the pale mother trod
The gloomy pathway to the nether god,
And spake with that dim Power which dwells below

The surface of whatever, where he wends,
The circling sun illumineth. And thou
Wast aye a friend to man. Of all his friends,
Perchance the friend most needed: needed now
Yet more than ever; in a complex age
Which changes while we gaze at it: from heaven
Seeking a sign, and finding no sign given,
And questioning Life's worn book at every page.

Nor ever yet, was song, untaught by thee,
Worthy to live immortally with man.
Wherefore, divine Experience, bend on me
Thy deep and searching eyes. Since life began,
Meek at thy mighty knees, though oft reproved,
I have sat, spelling out slow time with tears,
Where down the riddling alphabet of years
Thy guiding finger o'er the horn-book moved.

And I have put together many names:
Sorrow, and Joy, and Hope, and Memory,
And Love, and Anger; as an infant frames
The initials of a language wherein he
In manhood must with men communicate.
And oft, the words were hard to understand,
Harder to utter; still the solemn hand
Would pause, and point, and wait, and move, and wait;

Till words grew into language. Language grew
To utterance. Utterance into music passed.
I sang of all I learned, and all I knew.
And, looking upward in thy face, at last,
Beheld it flusht, as when a mother hears
Her infant feebly singing his first hymn,
And dreams she sees, albeit unseen of him,
Some radiant listener lured from other spheres.

Such songs have been my solace many a while
And oft, when other solace I had none,
From grief which lay heart-broken on a smile,
And joy that glittered like a winter sun,
And froze, and fevered: from the great man's scorn,
The mean man's envy; friends' unfriendliness;
Love's want of human kindness, and the stress
Of nights that hoped for nothing from the morn.

From these, and worse than these, did song unbar
A refuge through the ivory gate of dreams,
Wherein my spirit grew familiar
With spirits that glide by spiritual streams;
Song hath, for me, unsealed the genii sleeping
Under mid seas, and lured out of their lair
Beings with wondering eyes, and wondrous hair,
Tame to my feet at twilight softly creeping.

And song hath been my cymbal in the hours
Of triumph; when behind me, far away,
Lay Egypt, with its plagues; and, by strange powers,
Not mine, upheld, life's heaped ocean lay
On either side a passage for my soul.
A passage to the Land of Promise! trod
By giants, where the chosen race of God
Shall find, at last, its long predestined goal.

The breath which stirred these songs a little while
Has fleeted by; and, with it, fleeted too
The days I sought, thus singing, to beguile
Of thoughts that spring like weeds, which will creep through
The blank interstices of ruined fanes,
Where Youth, adoring, sacrificed — its heart,
To gods forever fallen.
Now, we part,
My songs and I. We part, and what remains?

Perchance an echo, and perchance no more,
Harp of my heart, from thy brief music dwells
In hearts, unknown, afar: as the wide shore
Retains within its hundred hollow shells
The voices of the spirits of the foam,
Which murmur in the language of the deeps,
Though haply far away, to one who keeps
Such ocean wealth to grace an inland home.

Within these cells of song, how frail soe'er,
The vast and wandering tides of human life
Have murmured once; and left, in passing, there,
Faint echoes of the tumult and the strife
Of the great ocean of humanity.
Fairies have danced within these hollow caves,
And Memory mused above the moonlit waves,
And Youth, the lover, here hath lingered by.

I sung of life, as life would have me sing,
Of falsehood, and of evil, and of wrong;
For many a false, and many an evil thing,
I found in life; and by my life my song
Was shaped within me while I sung: I sung
Of Good, for good is life's predestined end;
Of Sorrow, for I knew her as my friend;
Of Love, for by his hand my harp was strung.

I have not scrawled above the tomb of Youth
Those lying epitaphs, which represent
All virtues, and all excellence, save truth.
'T were easy, thus, to have been eloquent,
If I had held the fashion of the age
Which loves to hear its sounding flattery
Blown by all dusty winds from sky to sky,
And find its praises blotting every page.

And yet, the Poet and the Age are one.
And if the age be flawed, howe'er minute,
Deep through the poet's heart that rent doth run,
And shakes and mars the music of his lute.
It is not that his sympathy is less
With all that lives and all that feels around him,
But that so close a sympathy hath bound him
To these, that he must utter their distress.

We build the bridge, and swing the wondrous wire,
Bind with an iron hoop the rolling world;
Sport with the spirits of the ductile fire;
And leave our spells upon the vapor furled;

And cry — Behold the progress of the time!
Yet are we tending in an unknown land,
Whither, we neither ask nor understand,
Far from the peace of our unvalued prime!

And Strength and Force, the fiends which minister
To some new-risen Power beyond our span,
On either hand, with hook and nail, confer
To rivet the Promethean heart of man
Under the ravening and relentless beak
Of unappeasable Desire, which yet
The very vitals of the age doth fret.
The limbs are mighty, but the heart is weak.

Writhe on, Prometheus! or whate'er thou art,
Thou giant sufferer, groaning for a race
Thou canst not save, for all thy bleeding heart!
Thy wail my harp hath wakened; and my place
Shall be beside thee; and my blessing be
On all that makes me worthy yet to share
Thy lonely martyrdom, and with thee wear
That crown of anguish given to poets, and thee!

If to have wept, and wildly; to have loved
Till love grew torture; to have grieved till grief
Became a part of life; if to have proved
The want of all things; if, to draw relief
From poesy for passion, this avail,
I lack no title to my crown. The sea
Hath sent up nymphs for my society,
The mountains have been moved to hear my wail.

Nature and man were children long ago
In glad simplicity of heart and speech.
Now they are strangers to each other's woe;
And each hath language different from each.

The simplest songs sound sweetest and most good.
The simplest loves are the most loving ones.
Happier were song's forefathers than their sons.
And Homer sung as Byron never could.

But Homer cannot come again: nor ever
The quiet of the age in which he sung.
This age is one of tumult and endeavor,
And by a fevered hand its harps are strung.
And yet, I do not quarrel with the time;
Nor quarrel with the tumult of my heart,
Which of the tumult of the age is part;
Because its very weakness is sublime.

The passions are as winds on the wide sea
Of human life; which do impel the sails
Of man's great enterprise, whate'er that be.
The reckless helmsman, caught upon these gales,
Under the roaring gulfs goes down aghast.
The prudent pilot to the steadying breeze
Sparely gives head; and, over perilous seas,
Drops anchor 'mid the Fortunate Isles, at last.

We pray against the tempest and the strife,
The storm, the whirlwind, and the troublous hour,
Which vex the fretful element of life.
Me rather save, O dread disposing Power,
From those dead calms, that flat and hopeless lull,
In which the dull sea rots around the bark,
And nothing moves save the sure-creeping dark,
That slowly settles o'er an idle hull.

For in the storm, the tumult, and the stir
That shakes the soul, man finds his power and place
Among the elements. Deeps with deeps confer,
And Nature's secret settles in her face.

Let ocean to his inmost caves be stirred ;
Let the wild light be smitten from the cloud.
The decks may reel, the masts be snapt and bowed,
But God hath spoken out, and man hath heard !

Farewell, you lost inhabitants of my mind,
You fair ephemerals of faded hours !
Farewell, you lands of exile, whence each wind
Of memory steals with fragrance over flowers !
Farewell, Cordelia ! Ella ! . . . But not so
Farewell the memories of you which I have
Till strangers shall be sitting on my grave
And babbling of the dust which lies below.

Blesséd the man whose life, how sad soe'er,
Hath felt the presence, and yet keeps the trace
Of one pure woman ! With religious care
We close the doors, with reverent feet we pace
The vacant chambers, where, of yore, a Queen
One night hath rested. From my Past's pale walls
Yet gleam the unfaded fair memorials
Of her whose beauty there, awhile, hath been.

She passed, into my youth, at its night-time,
When low the lamplight, and the music husht.
She passed and passed away. Some broken rhyme
Scrawled on the panel or the pane : the crusht
And faded rose she dropped : the page she turned
And finished not : the ribbon or the knot
That fluttered from her . . . Stranger, harm them not !
I keep these sacred relics undiscerned.

Men's truths are often lies, and women's lies
Often the setting of a truth most tender
In an unconscious poesy. The child cries
To clutch the star that lights its rosy splendor
In airy Edens of the west afar.
"Ah, folly !" sighs the father, o'er his book.
"Millions of miles above thy foolish nook
Of infantile desire, the Hesperus-star

"Descends not, child, to twinkle on thy cot."
Then readjusts his blind-wise spectacles,
While tears to sobs are changing, were it not
The mother, with those tender syllables
Which even Dutch mothers can make musical too,
Murmurs, "Sleep, sleep, my little one ! and I
Will pluck thy star for thee, and by and by
Lay it upon thy pillow bright with dew."

And the child sleeps, and dreams of stars whose light
Beams in his own bright eyes when he awakes.
So sleep ! so dream ! If aught I read aright
That star, poor babe, which o'er thy cradle shakes,
Thy fate may fall, in after years, to be
That other child that, like thee, loves the star,
And, like thee, weeps to find it all so far,
Feeling its force in his nativity : —

That other infant, all as weak, as wild,
As passionate, and as helpless, as thou art,
Whom men will call a Poet (Poet, or child,
The star is still so distant from the heart !)
If so, heaven grant that thou mayst find at last,
Since such there are, some woman, whose sweet smile,
Pitying, may thy fond fancy yet beguile
To dream the star, which thou hast sought, thou hast !

For men, if thou shouldst heed what they may say,
Will break thy heart, or leave thee, like themselves
No heart for breaking. Wherefore I do pray
My book may lie upon no learnéd shelves,
But that in some deep summer eve, perchance,
Some woman, melancholy-eyed, and pale,
Whose heart, like mine, hath suffered, may this tale
Read by the soft light of her own romance.

Go forth over the wide world, Song of mine!
As Noah's dove out of his bosom flew
Over the desolate, vast, and wandering brine.
Seek thou thy nest afar. Thy plaint renew
From heart to heart, and on from land to land
Fly boldly, till thou find that unknown friend
Whose face, in dreams, above my own doth bend,
Then tell that spirit what it will understand,

Why men can tell to strangers all the tale
From friends reserved. And tell that spirit, my Song,
Wherefore I have not faltered to unveil
The cryptic forms of error and of wrong.
And say, I suffered more than I recorded,
That each man's life is all men's lesson. Say,
And let the world believe thee, as it may,
Thy tale is true, however weakly worded.

TANNHÄUSER;*

OR,

THE BATTLE OF THE BARDS.

A portion of this poem was written by another hand.

THIS is the Land, the happy valleys these,
Broad breadths of plain, blue-veined by many a stream,
Umbrageous hills, sweet glades, and forests fair,
O'er which our good liege, Landgrave Herman, rules.
This is Thuringia: yonder, on the heights,
Is Wartburg, seat of our dear lord's abode,
Famous through Christendom for many a feat
Of deftest knights, chief stars of chivalry,
At tourney in its courts; nor more renowned
For deeds of Prowess than exploits of Art,
Achieved when, vocal in its Muses' hall,
The minstrel-knights their glorious jousts renew,
And for the laurel wage harmonious war.
On this side spreads the Chase in wooded slopes
And sweet acclivities; and, all beyond,
The open flats lie fruitful to the sun
Full many a league; till, dark against the sky,
Bounding the limits of our lord's domain,
The Hill of Hörsel rears his horrid front.
Woe to the man who wanders in the vast
Of those unhallowed solitudes, if Sin,
Quickening the lust of carnal appetite,
Lurk secret in his heart: for all their caves
Echo weird strains of magic, direful-sweet,
That lap the wanton sense in blissful ease;
While through the ear a reptile music creeps,
And, blandly-busy, round about the soul
Weaves its fell web of sounds. The unhappy wight
Thus captive made in soft and silken bands
Of tangled harmony, is led away —
Away adown the ever-darkening caves,
Away from fairness and the face of God,
Away into the mountain's mystic womb,
To where, reclining on her impious couch
All the fair length of her lascivious limbs,
Languid in light from roseate tapers flung,
Incensed with perfumes, tended on by fays,
The lustful Queen, waiting damnation, holds
Her bestial revels. The Queen of Beauty once,
A goddess called and worshipped in the days
When men their own infirmities adored,
Deeming divine who in themselves summed up
The full-blown passions of humanity.
Large fame and lavish service had she then,
Venus ycleped, of all the Olympian crew
Least continent of Spirits and most fair.
So reaped she honor of unwistful men,
Roman, or Greek, or dwellers on the plains
Of Egypt, or the isles to utmost Ind;
Till came the crack of that tremendous Doom
That sent the false gods shivering from their seats,
Shattered the superstitious dome that bleared
Heaven's face to man, and on the lurid world

* The reader is solicited to adopt the German pronunciation of TANNHÄUSER, by sounding it as if it were written, in English, "Tannhoiser."

Let in effulgence of untainted light.
As when, laid bare beneath the delver's toil
On some huge bulk of buried masonry
In hoar Assyria, suddenly revealed
A chamber, gay with sculpture and the pomp
Of pictured tracery on its glowing walls,
No sooner breathes the wholesome heavenly air
Than fast its colored bravery fades, and fall
Its ruined statues, crumbled from their crypts,
And all its gauds grow dark at sight of day;
So darkened and to dusty ruin fell
The fleeting glories of a Pagan faith,
Bared to Truth's influences bland, and smit
Blind by the splendors of the Bethlehem Dawn.
Then from their shattered temple in the minds
Of men, and from their long familiar homes,
Their altars, fanes, and shrines, the sumptuous seats
Of their mendacious oracles, out-slunk
The wantons of Olympus. Forth they fled,
Forth from Dodona, Delos, and the depths
Of wooded Ida; from Athenæ forth,
Cithæron, Paphos, Thebes, and all their groves
Of oak or poplar, dismally to roam
About the new-baptizéd earth; exiled,
Bearing the curse, yet suffered for a space,
By Heaven's clear sapience and inscrutable ken,
To range the wide world, and assay their powers
To unregenerate redeemed mankind:
If haply they by shadows and by shows,
Phantasmagoria, and illusions wrought
Of sight or sound by sorcery, may draw
Unwary men, or weak, into the nets
Of Satan their great Captain. She renowned
"The fairest," fleeing from her Cyprian isle,
Swept to the northwards many a league, and lodged
At length on Hörsel, into whose dark womb
She crept confounded. Thither soon she drew
Lewd Spirits to herself, and there abides,
Holding her devilish orgies; and has power
With siren voices crafty to compel
Into her wanton home unhappy men
Whose souls to sin are prone. The pure at heart
Nathless may roam about her pestilent hill
Untainted, proof against perfidious sounds
Within whose ears an angel ever sings
Good tidings of great joy. Nor even they,
Whose hearts are gross, and who inflamed with lust
Enter, entrapped by sorceries, to her cave,
Are damned beyond redemption. For a while,
Slaves of their bodies, in the sloughs of Sin,
They roll contented, wallowing in the arms
Of their libidinous goddess. But, erelong,
Comes loathing of the sensual air they breathe,
Loathing of light unhallowed, sickening sense
Of surfeited enjoyment; and their lips,
Spurning the reeky pasture, yearn for draughts
Of rock-rebounding rills, their eyes for sight
Of Heaven, their limbs for lengths of dewy grass:
What time sharp Conscience pricks them, and awake
Starts the requickened soul with all her powers,
And breaks, if so she will, the murderous spell,
Calling on God. God to her rescue sends
Voiced seraphims that lead the sinner forth
From darkness unto day, from foul embrace
Of that bloat Queen into the mother-lap
Of earth, and the caressent airs of Heaven;
Where he, by strong persistency of prayer,
By painful pilgrimage, by lengths of fast
That tame the rebel flesh, by many a night
Of vigil, days of deep repentant tears,

May cleanse his soul of her adulterate stains,
May from his sin-incrusted spirit shake
The leprous scales, — and, purely at the feet
Of his Redemption falling, may arise
Of Christ accepted. Whoso doubts the truth,
Doubting how deep divine Compassion is,
Lend to my tale a willing ear, and learn.

Full twenty summers have fled o'er the land,
A score of winters on our Landgrave's head
Have showered their snowy honors, since the days
When in his court no nobler knight was known,
And in his halls no happier bard was heard,
Than bright Tannhäuser. Warrior, minstrel, he
Throve for a while within the general eye,
As some king-cedar, in Crusader tales,
The stateliest growth of Lebanonian groves:
For now I sing him in his matchless prime,
Not, as in latter days, defaced and marred
By secret sin, and like the wasted torch
Found in the dank grass at the ghastly dawn,
After a witches' revel. He was a man
In whom prompt Nature, as in those soft climes
Where life is indolently opulent,
Blossomed unbid to graces barely won
From tedious culture, where less kindly stars
Cold influence keep; and trothful men, who once
Looked in his lordly, luminous eyes, and scanned
His sinewous frame, compact of pliant power,
Aver he was the fairest-favored knight
That ever, in the light of ladies' looks,
Made gay these goodly halls. Oh! deeper dole,
That so august a Spirit, sphered so fair,
Should from the starry sessions of his peers
Decline, to quench so bright a brilliancy
In Hell's sick spume. Ay me, the deeper dole!

From yonder tower the wheeling lapwing loves
Beyond all others, that o'ertops the pines,
And from his one white, wistful window stares
Into the sullen heart o' the land, — erewhile
The wandering woodman oft, at nightfall, heard
A sad, wild strain of solitary song
Float o'er the forest. Whoso heard it, paused
Compassionately, crossed himself, and sighed,
"Alas! poor Princess, to thy piteous moan
Heaven send sweet peace!" Heaven heard, and now she lies
Under the marble, 'mid the silent tombs,
Calm with her kindred; as her soul above
Rests with the saints of God.
The brother's child
Of our good lord the Landgrave was this maid,
And here with him abode; for in the breach
At Ascalon, her sire in Holy Land
Had fallen, fighting for the Cross. These halls
Sheltered her infancy, and here she grew
Among the shaggy barons, like the pale,
Mild-eyed, March-violet of the North, that blows
Bleak under bergs of ice. Full fair she grew,
And all men loved the rare Elizabeth;
But she, of all men, loved one man the most,
Tannhäuser, minstrel, knight, the man in whom
All mankind flowered. Fairer growth, indeed,
Of knighthood never blossomed to the eye;
But, furled beneath that florid surface, lurked
A vice of nature, breeding death, not life;
Such as where some rich Roman, to delight
Luxurious days with labyrinthian walks
Of rose and lily, marble fountains, forms
Wanton of Grace or Nymph, and winding frieze
With sculpture rough, hath decked the summer haunts

Of his voluptuous villa, — there, festooned
With flowers, among the Graces and the Gods,
The lurking fever glides.
A dangerous skill,
Caught from the custom of those troubadours
That roam the wanton South, too near the homes
Of the lost gods, had crept in careless use
Among our northern bards ; to play the thief
Upon the poets of a pagan time,
And steal, to purfle their embroidered lays,
Voluptuous trappings of lascivious lore.
Hence had Tannhäuser, from of old, indulged
In song too lavish license to mislead
The sense among those fair but phantom forms
That haunt the unhallowed past : wherefrom One Shape
Forth of the cloudy circle gradual grew
Distinct, in dissolute beauty. She of old,
Who from the idle foam uprose, to reign
In fancies all as idle, — that fair fiend,
Venus, whose temples are the veins in youth.

Now more and ever more she mixed herself
With all his moods, and whispered in his walks ;
Or through the misty minster, when he kneeled
Meek on the flint, athwart the incense-smoke
She stole on sleeping sunbeams, sprinkled sounds
Of cymbals through the silver psalms, and marred
His adoration : most of all, whene'er
He sought to fan those fires of holy love
That, sleeping oftenest, sometimes leapt to flame,
Kindled by kindred passion in the eyes
Of sweet Elizabeth, round him rose and rolled
That miserable magic ; and, at times,
It drove him forth to wander in the waste
And desert places, there where prayerless man
Is most within the power of prowling fiends.

Time put his sickle in among the days.
Outcropped the coming harvest ; and there came
An evening with the Princess, when they twain
Together ranged the terrace that o'erlaps
The great south garden. All her simple hair
A single sunbeam from the sleepy west
O'erfloated ; swam her soft blue eyes suffused
With tender ruth, and her meek face was moved
To one slow, serious smile, that stole to find
Its resting-place on his.
Then, while he looked
On that pure loveliness, within himself
He faintly felt a mystery like pure love :
For through the arid hollows of a heart
Sered by delirious dreams, the dewy sense
Of innocent worship stole. The one great word
That long had hovered in the silent mind
Now on the lip half settled ; for not yet
Had love between them been a spoken sound
For after speech to lean on ; only here
And there, where scattered pauses strewed their talk,
Love seemed to o'erpoise the silence, like a star
Seen through a tender trouble of light clouds.
But, in that moment, some mysterious touch,
A thought — who knows ? — a memory — something caught
Perchance from flying fancies, taking form
Among the sunset clouds, or scented gusts
Of evening through the gorgeous glooms, shrunk up
His better angel, and at once awaked
The carnal creature sleeping in the flesh.
Then died within his heart that word of life
Unspoken, which, if spoken, might have saved
The dreadful doom impending. So they twain
Parted, and nothing said : she to her tower,
There with meek wonder to renew the calm

And customary labor of the loom ;
And he into the gradual-creeping dark
Which now began to draw the rooks to roost
Along the windless woods.
His soul that eve
Shook strangely if some flickering shadow stole
Across the slopes where sunset, sleeping out
The day's last dream, yet lingered low.
Old songs
Were sweet about his brain, old fancies fair
O'erflowed with lurid life the lonely land :
The twilight trooped with antic shapes, and swarmed
Above him, and the deep mysterious woods
With mystic music drew him to his doom.
So rapt, with idle and with errant foot
He wandered on to Hörsel, and those glades
Of melancholy fame, whose poisonous glooms,
Decked with the gleaming hemlock, darkly fringe
The Mount of Venus. There, a drowsy sense
Of languor seized him ; and he sat him down
Among a litter of loose stones and blocks
Of broken columns, overrun with weed,
Remnants of heathen work that sometime propped
A pagan temple.
Suddenly, the moon,
Slant from the shoulder of the monstrous hill,
Swung o'er a sullen lake, and softly touched
With light a shattered statue in the weed.
He lifted up his eyes, and all at once,
Bright in her baleful beauty, he beheld
The goddess of his dreams. Beholding whom,
Lost to his love, forgetful of his faith,
And fevered by the stimulated sense
Of reprobate desire, the madman cried :
"Descend, Dame Venus, on my soul descend !
Break up the marble sleep of those still brows
Where beauty broods ! Down all my senses swim,
As yonder moon to yonder love-lit lake
Swims down in glory !"
Hell the horrid prayer
Accorded with a curse. Scarce those wild words
Were uttered, when like mist the marble moved,
Flusht with false life. Deep in a sleepy cloud
He seemed to sink beneath the sumptuous face
Leaned o'er him, — all the whiteness, all the warmth,
And all the luxury of languid limbs,
Where violet vein-streaks, lost in limpid lengths
Of snowy surface, wander faint and fine ;
Whilst cymballed music, stolen from underneath,
Creeps through a throbbing light that grows and glows
From glare to greater glare, until it gluts
And gulfs him in.
And from that hour, in court,
And chase, and tilted tourney, many a month,
From mass in holy church, and mirth in hall,
From all the fair assemblage of his peers,
And all the feudatory festivals,
Men missed Tannhäuser.
At the first, as when
From some great oak his goodliest branch is lopped,
The little noisy birds, that built about
The foliage, gather in the gap with shrill
And querulous curiosity ; even so,
From all the twittering tongues that thronged the court
Rose general hubbub of astonishment,
And vext surmise about the absent man :
Why absent ? whither wandered ? on what quest
Of errant prowess ? — for, as yet, none knew
His miserable fall. But time wore on,
The wonder wore away ; round absence crept
The weed of custom, and the absent one
Became at last a memory, and no more.

One heart within that memory lived aloof ;
One face, remembering his, forgot to smile ;

Our Landgrave's niece the old familiar ways
Walked like a ghost with unfamiliar looks.

Time put his sickle in among the days.
The rose burned out; red Autumn lit the woods;
The last snows, melting, changed to snowy clouds;
And Spring once more with incantations came
To wake the buried year. Then did our liege,
Lord Landgrave Herman, — for he loved his niece,
And lightly from her simple heart had won
The secret of lost smiles, and why she drooped,
A wilted flower, — thinking to dispel,
If that might be, her mournfulness, let cry
By heralds that, at coming Whitsuntide,
The minstrel-knights in Wartburg should convene
To hold high combat in the craft of song,
And sing before the Princess for the prize.

But, ere that time, it fell upon a day
When our good lord went forth to hunt the hart,
That he with certain of his court, 'mid whom
Was Wolfram, — once Tannhäuser's friend, himself
Among the minstrels held in high renown, —
Came down the Wartburg valley, where they deemed
To hold the hart at siege, and found him not:
But found, far down, at bottom of the glade,
Beneath a broken cross, a lonely knight
Who sat on a great stone, watching the clouds.
And Wolfram, being a little in the van
Of all his fellows, eager for the hunt,
Hurriedly ran to question of the knight
If he had viewed the hart. But when he came
To parley with him, suddenly he gave
A shout of great good cheer; for, all at once,
In that same knight he saw, and knew, though changed,
Tannhäuser, his old friend and fellow-bard.

Now, Wolfram long had loved Elizabeth
As one should love a star in heaven, who knows
The distance of it, and the reachlessness.
But when he knew Tannhäuser in her heart
(For loving eyes, in eyes beloved are swift
To search out secrets) not the less his own
Clave unto both; and, from that time, his love
Lived like an orphan child in charity,
Whose loss came early, and is gently borne,
Too deep for tears, too constant for complaint.
And, therefore, in the absence of his friend
His inmost heart was heavy, when he saw
The shadow of that absence in the face
He loved beyond all faces upon earth.

So that when now he found that friend again
Whom he had missed and mourned, right glad was he
Both for his own and for the Princess' sake:
And ran and fell upon Tannhäuser's neck,
And all for joy constrained him to his heart,
Calling his fellows from the neighboring hills,
Who, crowding, came, great hearts and open arms
To welcome back their peer. The Landgrave then,
When he perceived his well-belovéd knight,
Was passing glad, and would have questioned him
Of his long absence. But the man himself
Could answer nothing; staring with blank eyes
From face to face, then up into the blue
Bland heavens above; astonied, and like one
Who, suddenly awaking out of sleep

After sore sickness, knows his friends again,
And would peruse their faces, but breaks off
To list the frolic bleating of the lamb
In far-off fields, and wonder at the world
And all its strangeness. Then, while the glad knights
Clung round him, wrung his hands, and dinned his ears
With clattering query, our fair lord himself
Unfolded how, upon the morrow morn,
There should be holden festive in his halls
High meeting of the minstrels of the land,
To sing before the Princess for the prize:
Whereto he bade him with, "O sir, be sure
There lives a young voice that shall tax your wit
To justify this absence from your friends.
We trust, at least, that you have brought us back
A score of giants' beards, or dragons' tails,
To lay them at the feet of our fair niece.
For think not, truant, that Elizabeth
Will hold you lightly quitted."
At that name,
Elizabeth, he started as a man
That hears on foreign shores, from alien lips,
Some name familiar to his fatherland;
And all at once the man's heart inly yearns
For brooks that bubble, and for woods that wave
Before his father's door, while he forgets
The forms about him. So Tannhäuser mused
A little space, then faltered: "O my liege,
Fares my good lady well?—I pray my lord
That I may draw me hence a little while,
For all my mind is troubled: and, indeed,
I know not if my harp have lost his skill,
But, skilled, or skilless, it shall find some tone
To render thanks to-morrow to my lord;
To whose behests a bondsman, in so far
As my poor service holds, I will assay
To sing before the Princess for the prize."

Then, on the morrow morn, from far and near
Flowed in the feudatory lords. The hills
Broke out ablaze with banners, and rung loud
With tingling trumpet notes, and neighing steeds.
For all the land, elate with lusty life,
Buzzed like a beehive in the sun; and all
The castle swarmed from bridge to barbican
With mantle and with mail, whilst minster-bells
Rang hoarse their happy chimes, till the high noon
Clanged from the towers. Then, o'er the platform stoled
And canopied in crimson, lightly blew
The sceptred heralds on the silver trump
Intense sonorous music, sounding in
The knights to hall. Shrill clinked the corridors
Through all the courts with clashing heels, or moved
With silken murmurs, and elastic sounds
Of lady laughters light; as in they flowed
Lord, Liegeman, Peer, and Prince, and Paladin,
And dame and damsel, clad in dimpling silk
And gleaming pearl; who, while the groaning roofs
Re-echoed royal music, swept adown
The spacious hall, with due obeisance made
To the high daïs, and on glittering seats
Dropped one by one, like flocks of burnished birds
That settle down with sunset-painted plumes
On gorgeous woods. Again from the outer wall
The intermitted trumpet blared; and each
Pert page, a-tiptoe, from the benches leaned
To see the minstrel-knights, gold-filleted,
That entered now the hall: Sir Mandeville,
The Swan of Eisnach; Wilfrid of the Hills;
Wolfram, surnamed of Willow-brook; and next
Tannhäuser, christened of the Golden Harp;

With Walter of the Heron-chase; and Max,
The seer; Sir Rudolph, of the Raven-crest;
And Franz, the falconer. They entered, each
In order, followed by a blooming boy
That bore his harp, and, pacing forward, bowed
Before the Landgrave and Elizabeth.

Pale sat the Princess in her chair of state,
Perusing with fixed eyes, that all belied
Her throbbing heart, the carven architrave,
Whereon the intricate much-vexed design
Of leaf and stem disinterwined itself
With infinite laboriousness, at last
Escaping in a flight of angel forms;
As though the carver's thought had been to show
The weary struggle of the soul to free
Her flight from earth's bewilderment, and all
That frets her in the flesh. But when, erewhile,
The minstrels entered, and Tannhäuser bowed
Before the daïs, the Landgrave, at her side,
Saw, as he mused what theme to give for song,
The pallid forehead of Elizabeth
Flush to the fair roots of her golden hair,
And thought within himself: "Our knight delays
To own a love that aims so near our throne;
Hence, haply, this late absence from our court,
And those bewildered moods which I have marked:
But since love lightly catches, where it can,
At any means to make itself approved,
And since the singer may to song confide
What the man dares not trust to simple speech,
I, therefore, so to ease two hearts at once,
And signify our favor unto both,
Will to our well-belovéd minstrels give
No theme less sweet than Love: for, surely, he
That loves the best, will sing the best, and bear
The prize from all." Therewith the Landgrave rose,
And all the murmuring Hall was hushed to hear.

"O well-belovéd minstrels, in my mind
I do embrace you all, and heartily
Bid you a lavish welcome to these halls.
Oft have you flooded this fair space with song,
Waked these voiced walls, and vocal made yon roof,
As waves of surging music lapped against
Its resonant rafters. Often have your strains
Ennobled souls of true nobility,
Rapt by your perfect pleadings in the cause
Of all things pure unto a purer sense
Of their exceeding loveliness. No power
Is subtler o'er the spirit of man than Song —
Sweet echo of great thoughts, that, in the mind
Of him who hears congenial echoes waking,
Remultiplies the praise of what is good.
Song cheers the emulous spirit to the top
Of Virtue's rugged steep, from whence, all heights
Of human worth attained, the mortal may
Conjecture of God's unattainable,
Which is Perfection. — Faith, with her sisters twain
Of Hope and Charity, ye oft have sung,
And loyal Truth have lauded, and have wreathed
A coronal of music round the brows
Of stainless Chastity; nor less have praised
High-minded Valor, in whose righteous hand
Burns the great sword of flaming Fortitude,
And have stirred up to deeds of high emprize
Our noble knights (yourselves among the noblest)
Whether on German soil for me, their prince,
Fighting, or in the Land of Christ for God.
Sing ye to-day another theme; to-day
Within our glad society we see,
To fellowship of loving friends restored,

A long-missed face; and hungerly our ears
Wait the melodious murmurs of a harp
That wont to feed them daintily. What drew
Our singer forth, and led the fairest light
Of all our galaxy to swerve astray
From his fixed orbit, and what now re-spheres,
After deflection long, our errant orb,
Implies a secret that the subtle power
Of Song, perchance, may solve. Be then your theme
As universal as the heart of man,
Giving you scope to touch its deepest depths,
Its highest heights, and reverently to explore
Its mystery of mysteries. Sing of Love:
Tell us, ye noble poets, from what source
Springs the prime passion; to what goal it tends!
Sing it how brave, how beautiful, how bright,
In essence how ethereal, in effect
How palpable, how human yet divine.
Up! up! loved singers, smite into the chords,
The lists are opened, set your lays in rest,
And who of Love best chants the perfect praise,
Him shall Elizabeth as conqueror hail
And round his royal temples bind the bays."

He said, and sat. And from the middle-hall
Four pages, bearers of the blazoned urn
That held the name-scrolls of the listed bards,
Moved to Elizabeth. Daintily her hand
Dipped in the bowl, and one drawn scroll delivered
Back to the pages, who, perusing, cried:
"Sir Wolfram of the Willow-brook, — begin."

Up rose the gentle singer — he whose lays,
Melodious-melancholy, through the Land
Live to this day — and, fair obeisance made,
Assumed his harp and stood in act to sing.
Awhile, his dreamy fingers o'er the chords
Wandered at will, and to the roof was turned
His meditative face; till, suddenly,
A soft light from his spiritual eyes
Broke, and his canticle he thus began: —

"Love among the saints of God,
Love within the hearts of men,
Love in every kindly sod
That breeds a violet in the glen;
Love in heaven, and Love on earth,
Love in all the amorous air;
Whence comes Love? ah! tell me where
Had such a gracious Presence birth?
Lift thy thoughts to Him, all-knowing,
In the hallowed courts above;
From His throne, forever flowing,
Springs the fountain of all Love:
Down to earth the stream descending
Meets the hills, and murmurs then,
In a myriad channels wending,
Through the happy haunts of men.
Blessèd ye, earth's sons and daughters,
Love among you flowing free;
Guard, oh! guard its sacred waters,
Tend on them religiously:
Let them through your hearts steal sweetly,
With the Spirit, wise and bland,
Minister unto them meetly,
Touch them not with carnal hand.

"Maiden, fashioned so divinely,
Whom I worship from afar,
Smile thou on my soul benignly
Sweet, my solitary star:
Gentle harbinger of gladness,
Still be with me on the way;
Only soother of my sadness,
Always near, though far away:
Always near, since first upon me
Fell thy brightness from above,
And my troubled heart within me
Felt the sudden flow of Love;
At thy sight that gushing river
Paused, and fell to perfect rest,
And the pool of Love forever
Took thy image to its breast.

"Let me keep my passion purely,
Guard its waters free from blame,
Hallow Love, as knowing surely
It returneth whence it came;
From all channels, good or evil,
Love, to its pure source enticed,
Finds its own immortal level
In the charity of Christ.

"Ye who hear, behold the river,
Whence it cometh, whither goes;
Glory be to God, the Giver,
From whose grace the fountain flows,
Flows and spreads through all creation,
Counter-charm of every curse,
Love, the waters of Salvation,
Flowing through the universe!"

And still the rapt bard, though his voice had ceased,
And all the Hall had murmured into praise,
Pursued his plaintive theme among the chords,
Blending with instinct fine the intricate throng
Of thoughts that flowed beneath his touch to find
Harmonious resolution. As he closed,
Tannhäuser rising, fretted with delay,
Sent flying fingers o'er the strings, and sang:—

"Love be my theme! Sing her awake,
My harp, for she hath tamely slept
In Wolfram's song, a stagnant lake
O'er which a shivering star hath crept.

"Awake, dull waters, from your sleep,
Rise, Love, from thy delicious well,
A fountain!—yea, but flowing deep
With nectar and with hydromel;

"With gurgling murmurs sweet, that teach
My soul a sleep-distracting dream,
Till on the marge I lie, and reach
My longing lips towards the stream;

"Whose waves leap upwards to the brink
With drowning kisses to invite
And drag me, willing, down to drink
Delirious draughts of rare Delight;

"Who careless drink, as knowing well
The happy pastime shall not tire,
For Love is inexhaustible,
And all-unfailing my Desire.

"Love's fountain-marge is fairly spread
With every incense-flower that blows,
With flossy sedge, and moss that grows
For fervid limbs a dewy bed;

"And fays and fairies flit and wend
To keep the sweet stream flowing free,
And on Love's languid votary
The little elves delighted tend;

"And bring him honey-dews to sip,
Rare balms to cool him after play,
Or with sweet unguents smooth away
The kiss-crease on his ruffled lip;

"And lilywhite his limbs they lave,
And roses in his cheeks renew,
That he, refreshed, return to glue
His lips to Love's caressent wave;

"And feel, in that immortal kiss,
His mortal instincts die the death,
And human fancy fade beneath
The taste of unimagined bliss!

"Thus, gentle audience, since your ear
Best loves a metaphoric lay,
Of mighty Love I warble here
In figures, such as Fancy may:

"Now know ye how of Love I think
As of a fountain, failing never,
On whose soft marge I lie, and drink
Delicious draughts of Joy forever."

Abrupt he ceased, and sat. And for a space,
No longer than the subtle lightning rests
Upon a sultry cloud at eventide,
The Princess smiled, and on her parted lips
Hung inarticulate applause; but she
Sudden was 'ware that all the hall was mute
With blank disapprobation; and her smile
Died, and vague fear was quickened in her heart
As Walter of the Heron-chase began:—

"O fountain ever fair and bright,
He hath beheld thee, source of Love,
Who sung thee springing from above,
Celestial from the founts of Light;

"But he who from thy waters rare
Hath thought to drain a gross delight,
Blind in his spiritual sight,
Hath ne'er beheld thee, fountain fair!

"Hath never seen the silver glow
Of thy glad waves, crystalline clear,
Hath never heard within his ear
The music of thy murmurous flow.

"The essence of all Good thou art,
Thy waters are immortal Ruth,
Thy murmurs are the voice of Truth,
And music in the human heart:

"Thou yieldest Faith that soars on high,
And Sympathy that dwells on earth;
The tender trust in human worth,
The hope that lives beyond the sky.

"Oh! waters of the living Word,
Oh! fair vouchsafed us from above,
Oh! fountain of immortal Love,
What song of thee erewhile I heard!

"Learn, sacrilegious bard, from me
How all ignoble was thy strain,
That sought with trivial song to stain
The fountain of Love's purity;

"That fountain thou hast never found,
And shouldst thou come with lips of fire
To slake the thirst of brute Desire,
'T would shrink and shrivel to the ground:

"Who seeks in Love's pure stream to lave
His gross heart, finds damnation near;
Who laves in Love his spirit clear
Shall win Salvation from the wave."

And now again, as when the plaintive lay
Of Wolfram warbled to harmonious close,
The crowd grew glad with plaudits; and again
Tannhäuser, ruffled, rose his height, and smote
Rude in the chords his prelude of reply:—

"What Love is this that melts with Ruth,
Whose murmurs are the voice of Truth?
Ye dazéd singers, cease to dream,
And learn of me your human theme:
Of that great Passion at whose feet
The vassal-world lies low,
Of Love the mighty, Love the sweet,
I sing, who reigns below;
Who makes men fierce, tame, wild, or kind,
Sovran of every mood,
Who rules the heart, and rules the mind,
And courses through the blood:
Slave of that lavish Power I sing,
Dispenser of all good,
Whose pleasure-fountain is the spring
Of sole beatitude.

"Sing ye of Love ye ne'er possessed
In wretched tropes — a vain employment!
I sing the passion in my breast,
And know Love only in Enjoyment."

To whom, while all the rustling hall was moved
With stormy indignation, stern uprose,
Sharp in retort, Sir Wilfrid of the Hills:

"Up, minstrels! rally to the cry
Of outraged Love and Loyalty;
Drive on this slanderer, all the throng,
And slay him in a storm of song.
O lecher! shall I sing to thee
Of Love's untainted purity,
Of simple Faith, and tender Ruth,
Of Chastity and loyal Truth?
As well sing Day's resplendent birth
To the blind mole that delves the earth,
As seek from gross hearts, sloughed in sin,
Approval of pure Love to win!
Rather from thee I'll wring applause
For Love, the Avenger of his cause;
Great Love, the chivalrous and strong,
To whose wide grasp all arms belong,
The lance, the battle-axe, and thong, —
And eke the mastery in song.

"Love in my heart in all the pride
Of kinghood sits, and at his side,
To do the bidding of his lord,
Martial Valor holds the sword;
He strikes for Honor, in the name
Of Virtue and fair woman's fame,
And bids me shed my dearest blood
To venge asperséd maidenhood:
Who soils her with licentious lie,
Him will I hew both hip and thigh,
Or in her cause will dearly die.
But thou, who in thy flashy song
Hast sought to do *all* Honor wrong,
Pass on, — I will not stoop my crest
To smite thee, nor lay lance in rest.

Thy brawling words, of riot born,
Are worthy only of my scorn;
Thus at thy ears this song I fling,
Which in thy heart may plant its sting,
If ruined Conscience yet may wring
Remorse from such a guilty thing"

Scarce from his lips had parted the last word
When, through the rapturous praise that rang around,
Fierce from his seat, uprising, red with rage,
With scornful lip, and contumelious eye,
Tannhäuser clanged among the chords, and sang:

"Floutest thou me, thou grisly Bard?
Beware, lest I the just reward
On thy puffed insolence bestow,
And cleave thee with my falchion's blow, —
When I in song have laid thee low.
I serve a Mistress mightier far
Than tinkling rill, or twinkling star,
And, as in my great Passion's glow
Thy passion-dream will melt like snow,
So I, Love's champion, at her call,
Will make thee shrink in field or hall,
And roll before me like a ball.

"Thou pauper-minded pedant dim,
Thou starveling-soul, lean heart and grim,
Wouldst thou of Love the praises hymn?
Then let the gaunt hyena howl
In praise of Pity; let the owl
Whoop the high glories of the noon,
And the hoarse chough becroak the moon!
What canst thou prate of Love? I trow
She never graced thy open brow,
Nor flushed thy cheek, nor blossomed fair
Upon thy parted lips; nor e'er
Bade unpent passion wildly start
Through the forced portals of thy heart
To stream in triumph from thine eye,
Or else delicious death to die
On other lips, in sigh on sigh.

"Of Love, dispenser of all bliss,
Of Love, that crowns me with a kiss,
I here proclaim me champion-knight;
And in her cause will dearly fight
With sword or song, in hall or plain,
And make the welkin ring again
With my fierce blows, or fervent strain.
But for such Love as thou canst feel,
Thou wisely hast abjured the steel,
Averse to lay thy hand on hilt,
Or in her honor ride a tilt:
Tame Love full tamely may'st thou jilt,
And keep bone whole, and blood unspilt."

Out flushed Sir Wilfrid's weapon, and outleapt
From every angry eye a thousand darts
Of unsheathed indignation, and a shout
Went up among the rafters, and the Hall
Swayed to and fro with tumult; till the voice
Of our liege lord roared "Peace!" and, midst the clang
Of those who parted the incenséd bards,
Sounded the harp of Wolfram. Calm he stood,
He only calm of all the brawling crowd,
Which yet, as is its wont, contagion caught
From neighboring nobleness, and a stillness fell
On all, and in the stillness soft he sang:

"O, from your sacred seats look down,
Angels and ministers of good;
With sanctity our spirits crown,
And crush the vices of the blood!

"Open our hearts and set them free,
That heavenly light may enter in;
And from this fair society
Obliterate the taint of sin.

"Thee, holy Love, I bid arise
Propitious to my votive lay;
Shine thou upon our darkened eyes,
And lead us on the perfect way;

"As, in the likeness of a Star,
Thou once arosest, guidance meet,
And led'st the sages from afar
To sit at holy Jesu's feet:

"So guide us, safe from Satan's snares,
Shine out, sweet Star, around, above,
Till we have scaled the mighty stairs,
And reached thy mansions, Heavenly Love!"

Then, while great shouts went up of "Give the prize
To Wolfram," leapt Tannhäuser from his seat,
Fierce passion flaming from his lustrous orbs.
And, as a sinner, desperate to add
Depth to damnation by one latest crime,
Dies boastful of his blasphemies — even so,
Tannhäuser, conscious of the last disgrace
Incurred by such song in such company,
Intent to vaunt the vastness of his sin,
Thus, as in ecstasy, the song renewed:

"Goddess of Beauty, thee I hymn,
And ever worship at thy shrine;
Thou, who on mortal senses dim
Descending, makest man divine.

"Who hath embraced thee on thy throne,
And pastured on thy royal kiss,
He, happy, knows, and knows alone,
Love's full beatitude of bliss.

"Grim bards, of Love who nothing know,
Now cease the unequal strife between us;
Dare as I dared; to Hörsel go,
And taste Love on the lips of Venus."

Uprose on every side and rustled down
The affrighted dames; and, like the shuddering crowd
Of party-colored leaves that flits before
The gust of mid October, all at once
A hundred jewelled shoulders, huddling, swept
The hall, and slanted to the doors, and fled
Before the storm, which now from shaggy brows
'Gan dart indignant lightnings. One alone
Of all that awe-struck womanhood remained,
The Princess. She, a purple harebell frail,
That, swathed with whirlwind, to the bleak rock clings
When half a forest falls before the blast,
Rooted in utter wretchedness, and robed
In mockery of splendid state, still sat;
Still watched the waste that widened in her life;
And looked as one that in a nightmare hangs
Upon an edge of horror, while from beneath
The creeping billow of calamity
Sprays all his hair with cold; but hand or foot
He may not move, because the formless Fear
Gapes vast behind him. Grief within the void
Of her stark eyes stood tearless: terror blanched
Her countenance; and, over cloudy brows,
The shaken diamond made a restless light,
And trembled as the trembling star that hangs
O'er Cassiopeïa i' the windy north.

But now, from farthest end to end of all
The sullen movement swarming underneath,
Uprolled deep hollow groans of growing wrath.
And, where erewhile in rainbow crescent ranged
The bright-eyed beauties of the court, fast thronged
Faces inflamed with wrath, that rose and fell
Tumultuously gathering from between
Sharp-slanting lanes of steel. For every sword
Flashed bare upon a sudden; and over these,
Through the wide bursten doors the sinking sun
Streamed lurid, lighting up that steely sea;
Which, spotted white with foamy plumes, and ridged
With glittering iron, clashed together and closed
About Tannhäuser. Careless of the wrath
Roused by his own rash song, the singer stood;
Rapt in remembrance, or by fancy fooled
A visionary Venus to pursue,
With eyes that roamed in rapture the blank air.
Until the sharp light of a hundred swords
Smote on the fatal trance, and scattered all
Its fervid fascination. Swift from sheath

Then leapt the glaive and glittered in his hand,
And warily, with eye upon the watch,
Receding to the mighty main support
That, from the centre, propped the ponderous roof,
There, based against the pillar, fronting full
His sudden foes, he rested resolute,
Waiting assault.
But, hollow as a bell,
That tolls for tempest from a storm-clad tower,
Rang through the jangling shock of arms and men
The loud voice of the Landgrave. Wide he swept
The solemn sceptre, crying "Peace!" then said:

"Ye Lieges of Thuringia! whose just scorn,
In judgment sitting on your righteous brows,
Would seem to have forecast the dubious doom
Awaiting our decision; ye have heard,
Not wrung by torture from reluctant lips,
Nor yet breathed forth with penitential pain
In prayer for pardon, nay, but rather fledged
And barbed with boastful insolence, such a crime
Confest, as turns to burning coals of wrath
The dewy eyes of Pity, nor to Hope
One refuge spares, save such as rests perchance
Within the bounteous bosom of the Church;
Who, caring for the frailty of her flock,
Holds mercy measureless as heaven is high.
Shuddering, ourselves have listened to what breaks
All bonds that bound to this unhappy man
The covenanted courtesies of knights,
The loyalties of lives by faith knit fast
In spiritual communion. What behoves,
After deliberation, to award
In sentence, I to your high council leave,
Undoubting. What may mitigate in aught
The weight of this acknowledged infamy
Weigh with due balance. What to justice stern
Mild-minded mercy yet may reconcile
Search inly. Not with rashness, not in wrath,
Invoking from the right hand of high God
His dread irrevocable angel, Death;
Yet not unwary how one spark of hell,
If unextinguished, down the night of time
May, like the wreckers' beacon from the reefs,
Lure many to destruction: nor indeed
Unmindful of the doom by fire or steel
This realm's supreme tribunals have reserved
For those that, dealing in damnation, hold
Dark commerce with the common foe of man.
Weigh you in all its circumstance this crime:
And, worthily judging, though your judgment be
As sharp as conscience, be it as conscience clear."

He ended: and a bitter interval
Of silence o'er the solemn hall congealed,
Like frost on a waste water, in a place
Where rocks confront each other. Marshalled round,
Black-bearded cheek and chin, with hand on heft
Bent o'er the pommels of their planted swords
A dreary cirque of faces ominous,
The sullen barons on each other stared
Significant. As, ere the storm descends
Upon a Druid grove, the great trees stand
Looking one way, and stiller than their wont,
Until the thunder, rolling, frees the wind
That rocks them altogether; even so,
That savage circle of grim-gnarléd men,
Awhile in silence storing stormy thoughts,
Stood breathless; till a murmur moved them all,
And louder growing, and louder, burst at last
To a universal irrepressible roar
Of voices roaring, "Let him die the death!"
And, in that roar released, a hundred swords
Rushed forward, and in narrowing circle sloped

Sharp rims of shining horror round the doomed,
Undaunted minstrel. Then a piteous cry;
And from the purple baldachin down sprang
The Princess, gleaming like a ghost, and slid
Among the swords, and standing in the midst
Swept a wild arm of prohibition forth.
Cowering, recoiled the angry, baffled surge,
Leaving on either side a horrid hedge
Of rifted glare, as when the Red Sea waves
Hung heaped and sundered, ere they roaring fell
On Egypt's chariots. So there came a hush;
And in the hush her voice, heavy with scorn:

"Or shall I call you men? or beasts? who seem
No nobler than the bloodhound and the wolf
Which scorn to prey upon their proper kind!
Christians I will not call you! who defraud
That much-misapprehended holy name
Of reverence due by such a deed as, done,
Will clash against the charities of Christ,
And make a marred thing and a mockery
Of the fair face of Mercy. You dull hearts,
And hard! have ye no pity for yourselves?
For man no pity? man whose common cause
Is shamed and saddened by the stain that falls
Upon a noble nature! You blind hands,
Thrust out so fast to smite a fallen friend!
Did ye not all conspire, whilst yet he stood
The stateliest soul among you, to set forth
And fix him in the foremost ranks of men?
Content that he, your best, should bear the brunt,
And head the van against the scornful fiend
That will not waste his weapons on the herd,
But saves them for the noblest. And shall Hell
Triumph through you, that triumph in the shame
Of this eclipse that blots your brightest out,
And leaves you dark in his extinguished light?
O, who that lives but hath within his heart
Some cause to dread the suddenness of death?
And God is merciful; and suffers us,
Even for our sins' sake; and doth spare us time,
Time to grow ready, time to take farewell!
And sends us monitors and ministers —
Old age, that steals the fulness from the veins;
And griefs, that take the glory from the eyes;
And pains, that bring us timely news of death;
And tears, that teach us to be glad of him.
For who can take farewell of all his sins
On such a sudden summons to the grave?
Against high Heaven hath this man sinned, or you?
O, if it be against high Heaven, to Heaven
Remit the compt! lest, from the armory
Of the Eternal Justice ye pluck down,
Heedless, that bolt the Highest yet withholds
From this low-fallen head, — how fallen! how low!
Yet not so fallen, not so low fallen, but what
Divine Redemption, reaching everywhere,
May reach at last even to this wretchedness,
And, out of late repentance, raise it up
With pardon into peace."
She paused: she touched,
As with an angel's finger, him whose pride
Obdurate now had yielded, and he lay,
Vanquished by Pity, broken at her feet.
She, lingering, waited answer, but none came
Across the silence. And again she spake:

"O, not for him alone, and not for that
Which to remember now makes life for me

A wilderness of homeless griefs, I plead
Before you; but, O Princes, for yourselves;
For all that in your nobler nature stirs
To vindicate Forgiveness and enlarge
The lovely laws of Pity! Which of you,
Here in the witness of all-judging God,
Stands spotless? Which of you will boast himself
More miserably injured by this man
Than I, whose heart of all that lived in it
He hath untenanted? O, horrible!
Unheard of! from the blesséd lap of life
To send the soul, asleep in all her sins,
Down to perdition! Be not yours the hands
To do this desperate wrong in sight of all
The ruthful faces of the Saints in Heaven."

She passionately pleading thus, her voice
Over their hearts moved like that earnest wind
That, laboring long against some great nigh cloud,
Sets free, at last, a solitary star,
Then sinks; but leaves the night not all forlorn
Ere the soft rain o'ercomes it.
This long while
Wolfram, whose harp and voice were overborne
By burly brawlers in the turbulence
That shook that stormy senate, stood apart
With vainly-vigilant eye, and writhen hands,
All in mute trouble: too gentle to approve,
Too gentle to prevent, what passed: and still
Divided in himself 'twixt sharpest grief
To see his friend so fallen, and a drear
Strange horror of the crime whereby he fell.
So, like a headland light that down dark waves
Shines o'er some sinking ship it fails to save,
Looked the pale singer down the lurid hall.
But when the pure voice of Elizabeth
Ceased, and clear-lighted all with noble thoughts
Her face glowed as an angel's, the sweet Bard,
Whose generous heart had scaled with that loved voice
Up to the lofty levels where it ceased,
Stood forth, and from the dubious silence caught
And carried up the purpose of her prayer;
And drew it out, and drove it to the heart,
And clenched it with conviction in the mind,
And fixed it firm in judgment.
From deep muse
The Landgrave started, toward Tannhäuser strode,
And, standing o'er him with an eye wherein
Salt sorrow and a moody pity gleamed,
Spake hoarse of utterance:
"Arise! go forth!
Go from us, mantled in the shames which make
Thee, stranger whom mine eye henceforth abhors,
The mockery of the man I loved, and mourn.
Go from these halls yet holy with the voice
Of her whose intercession for thy sake, —
If any sacred sorrow yet survive
All ruined virtues, — in remorse shall steep
The memory of her wrongs. For thee remains
One hope, unhappiest! reject it not.
There goeth a holy pilgrimage to Rome,
Which not yet from the borders of our land
Is parted; pious souls and meek, whom thou
Haply may'st join, and of those holy hands,
Which sole have power to bind or loose, receive
Remission of thy sin. For save alone
The hand of Christ's high Vicar upon earth
A hurt so heinous what may heal? What save
A soul so fallen? Go forth upon thy ways,
Which are not ours: for we no more may mix
Congenial minds in converse sweet, no more
Together pace these halls, nor ever hear
Thy harp as once when all was pure and glad,

Among the days which have been. All thy paths
Henceforth be paths of penitence and prayer,
Whilst over ours thy memory moving makes
A shadow, and a silence in our talk.
Get thee from hence, O all that now remains
Of one we honored! Till the hand that holds
The keys of heaven hath oped for thee the doors
Of life in that far distance, let mine eye
See thee no more. Go from us!"

Even then,
Even whilst he spake, like some sweet miracle,
From darkening lands that glimmered through the doors
Came, faintly heard along the filmy air
That bore it floating near, a choral chant
Of pilgrims pacing by the castle wall;
And "*salvum me fac Domine*" they sung
Sonorous, in the ghostly going out
Of the red-litten eve along the land.

Then, like a hand across the heart of him
That heard it moved that music from afar,
And beckoned forth the better hope which leads
A man's life up along the rugged road
Of high resolve. Tannhäuser moved, as moves
The folded serpent smitten by the spring
And stirred with sudden sunlight, when he casts
His spotted skin, and, renovated, gleams
With novel hues. One lingering long look,
Wild with remorse and vague with vast regrets,
He lifted to Elizabeth. His thoughts
Were then as those dumb creatures in their pain
That make a language of a look. He tossed
Aloft his arms, and down to the great doors
With drooped brows striding, groaned "To Rome, to Rome!"
Whilst the deep hall behind him caught the cry
And drove it clamorous after him, from all
Its hollow roofs reverberating "Rome!"

A fleeting darkness through the lurid arch;
A flying form along the glare beyond;
And he was gone. The scowling Eve reached out
Across the hills a fiery arm, and took
Tannhäuser to her, like a sudden death.

So ended that great Battle of the Bards,
Whereof some rumor to the end of time
Will echo in this land.
And, voided now
Of all his multitudes, the mighty Hall,
Dumb, dismally dispageanted, laid bare
His ghostly galleries to the mournful moon;
And Night came down, and Silence, and the twain
Mingled beneath the starlight. Wheeled at will
The flitter-wingéd bat round lonely towers
Where, one by one, from darkening casements died
The taper's shine; the howlet from the hills
Whooped; and Elizabeth, alone with Night
And Silence, and the Ghost of her slain youth,
Lay lost among the ruins of that day.

As when the buffeting gusts, that adverse blow
Over the Caribbean Sea, conspire
Conflicting breaths, and, savagely begot,
The fierce tornado rotatory wheels,
Or sweeps centripetal, or, all forces joined,
Whirls circling o'er the maddened waves, and they
Lift up their foaming backs beneath the keel
Of some frail vessel, and, careering high
Over a sunken rock, with a sudden plunge
Confound her, — stunned and strained, upon the peak
Poising one moment, ere she forward fall
To float, dishelmed, a wreck upon the waves:
So rose, engendered by what furious blasts

Of passion, that fell hurricane that swept
Elizabeth to her doom, and left her now
A helmless hull upon the savage seas
Of life, without an aim, to float forlorn.

Longwhile, still shuddering from the shock that jarred
The bases of her being, piteous wreck
Of ruined hopes, upon her couch she lay,
Of life and time oblivious; all her mind,
Locked in a rigid agony of grief,
Clasping, convulsed, its unwept woe; her heart
Writhing and riven; and her burthened brain
Blind with the weight of tears that would not flow.
But when, at last, the healing hand of Time
Had wrought repair upon her shattered frame;
And those unskilled physicians of the mind —
Importunate, fond friends, a host of kin —
Drew her perforce from solitude, she passed
Back to the world, and walked its weary ways
With dull mechanic motions, such as make
A mockery of life. Yet gave she never,
By weeping or by wailing, outward sign
Of that great inward agony that she bore;
For she was not of those whose sternest sorrow
Outpours in plaints, or weeps itself in dew;
Not passionate she, nor of the happy souls
Whose grief comes tempered with the gift of tears.

So, through long weeks and many a weary moon,
Silent and self-involved, without a sigh,
She suffered. There, whence consolation comes,
She sought it — at the foot of Jesu's cross,
And on the bosom of the Virgin-spouse,
And in communion with the blesséd Saints.
But chief for him she prayed whose grievous sin
Had wrought her desolation; God besought
To touch the leprous soul and make it clean;
And sued the Heavenly Pastor to recall
The lost sheep, wandered from the pleasant ways,
Back to the pasture of the paths of peace.
So thrice a day, what time the blushing morn
Crimsoned the orient sky, and when the sun
Glared from mid-heaven or weltered in the west,
Fervent she prayed; nor in the night forewent
Her vigils; till at last from prayer she drew
A calm into her soul, and in that calm
Heard a low whisper — like the breeze that breaks
The deep peace of the forest ere the chirp
Of earliest bird salutes the advent Day —
Thrill through her, herald of the dawn of Hope.

Then most she loved from forth her leafy tower
Listless to watch the irrevocable clouds
Roll on, and daylight waste itself away
Along those dreaming woods, whence evermore
She mused, "He will return"; and fondly wove
Her webs of wistful fantasy till the moon
Was high in heaven, and in its light she kneeled,
A faded watcher through the weary night,
A meek, sweet statue at the silver shrines,
In deep, perpetual prayer for him she loved.
And from the pitying Sisterhood of Saints
Haply that prayer shall win an angel down
To be his unseen minister, and draw
A drowning conscience from the deeps of Hell.

Time put his sickle in among the days.
Blithe Summer came, and into dimples danced
The fair and fructifying Earth, anon
Showering the gathered guerdon of her play

Into the lap of Autumn ; Autumn stored
The gift, piled ready to the palsied hand
Of blind and begging Winter ; and when he
Closed his well-provendered days, Spring lightly came
And scattered sweets upon his sullen grave.
And twice the seasons passed, the sisters three
Doing glad service for their hoary brother,
And twice twelve moons had waxed and waned, and twice
The weary world had pilgrimed round the sun,
When from the outskirts of the land there came
Rumor of footsore penitents from Rome
Returning, jubilant of remitted sin.

So chanced it, on a silent April eve
The westering sun along the Wartburg vale
Shot level beams, and into glory touched
The image of Madonna,— where it stands
Hard by the common way that climbs the steep, —
The image of Madonna, and the face
Of meek Elizabeth turned towards the Queen
Of Sorrows, sorrowful in patient prayer ;
When, through the silence and the sleepy leaves,
A breeze blew up the vale, and on the breeze
Floated a plaintive music. She that heard,
Trembled ; the prayer upon her parted lips
Suspended hung, and one swift hand she pressed
Against the palpitating heart whose throbs
Confused the cunning of her ears. Ah God !
Was this the voice of her returning joy ?
The psalm of shriven pilgrims to their homes
Returning ? Ay ! it swells upon the breeze
The "*Nunc Dimittis*" of glad souls that sue
After salvation seen to part in peace.
Then up she sprung, and to a neighboring copse
Swift as a startled hind, when the ghostly moon
Draws sudden o'er the silvered heather-bells
The monstrous shadow of a cloud, she sped ;
Pausing, low-crouched, within a maze of shrubs,
Whose emerald slivers fringed the rugged way
So broad, the pilgrim's garments as they passed
Would brush the leaves that hid her. And anon
They came in double rank, and two by two,
With cumbered steps, with haggard gait that told
Of bodily toil and trouble, with besoiled
And tattered garments ; nathless with glad eyes,
Whence looked the soul disburthened of her sin,
Climbing the rude path, two by two they came.
And she, that watched with what intensest gaze
Them coming, saw old faces that she knew,
And every face turned skywards, while the lips
Poured out the heavenly psalm, and every soul
Sitting seraphic in the upturned eyes
With holy fervor rapt upon the song.
And still they came and passed, and still she gazed ;
And still she thought, "Now comes he !" and the chant
Went heavenwards, and the filéd pilgrims fared
Beside her, till their tale wellnigh was told.
Then o'er her soul a shuddering horror crept,
And, in that agony of mind that makes
Doubt more intolerable than despair,
With sudden hand she brushed aside the sprays,
And from the thicket leaned and looked. The last
Of all the pilgrims stood within the ken
Of her keen gaze, — save him all scanned, and he
No sooner scanned than cancelled from her eyes
By vivid lids swept down to lash away
Him hateful, being other than she sought.
So for a space, blind with dismay, she paused,

But, he approaching, from the thicket leapt,
Clutched with wrung hands his robe, and gasped, "The Knight
That with you went, returns not?" In his psalm
The fervid pilgrim made no pause, yet gazed
At his wild questioner, intelligent
Of her demand, and shook his head and passed.
Then she, with that mute answer stabbed to the heart,
Sprung forward, clutched him yet once more, and cried,
"In Mary's name, and in the name of God,
Received the knight his shrift?" And, once again,
The pilgrim, sorrowful, shook his head and sighed,
Sighed in the singing of his psalm, and passed.

Then prone she fell upon her face, and prone
Within her mind Hope's shattered fabric fell, —
The dear and delicate fabric of frail Hope
Wrought by the simple cunning of her thoughts,
That, laboring long, through many a dreamy day
And many a vigil of the wakeful night,
Piecemeal had reared it, patiently, with pain,
From out the ruins of her ancient peace.
O ancient Peace! that never shalt return;
O ruined Hope! O Fancy! over-fond,
Futile artificer that build'st on air,
Marred is thy handiwork, and thou shalt please
With plastic fantasies her soul no more.

So lay she cold against the callous ground,
Her pale face pillowed on a stone, her eyes
Wide open, fixed into a ghastly stare
That knew no speculation; for her mind
Was dark, and all her faculty of thought
Compassionately cancelled. But she lay
Not in the embrace of loyal Death, who keeps
His bride forever, but in treacherous arms
Of Sleep that, sated, will restore to Grief
Her, snatched a sweet space from his cruel clutch,
So lay she cold against the callous ground,
And none was near to heed her, as the sun,
About him drawing the vast-skirted clouds,
Went down behind the western hill to die.

Now Wolfram, when the rumor reached his ears
That, from their quest of saving grace returned,
The pilgrims all within the castle-court
Were gathered, flocked about by happy friends,
Passed from his portal swiftly, and ran out
And joined the clustering crowd. Full many a face,
Wasted and wan, he recognized, and clasped
Full many a lean hand clutching at his own,
Of those who, stretched upon the grass, or propped
Against the bowlder-stones, were pressed about
By weeping women, clamorous to unbind
Their sandal-thongs and bathe the bruiséd feet.
Then up and down, and swiftly through and through,
And round about, skirting the crowd, he hurried,
With greetings fair to all; till, filled with fear,
Half-hopeless of his quest, yet harboring hope,
He paused perplexed beside the castle gates.
There, at his side, the youngest of the train,
A blue-eyed pilgrim tarried, and to him
Turned Wolfram questioning of Tannhäuser's fate,
And learnt in few words how, his sin pronounced
Deadly and irremediable, the knight
Had faded from before the awful face
Of Christ's incenséd Vicar; and none knew
Whither he wandered, to what desolate lands,
Hiding his anguish from the eyes of men.
Then Wolfram groaned, and clasped his hands, and cried,

"Merciful God!" and fell upon his knees
In purpose as of prayer, — but, suddenly,
About the gate the crowd moved, and a cry
Went up for space, when, rising, he beheld
Four maids who on a pallet bore the form
Of wan Elizabeth. The whisper grew
That she had met the pilgrims, and had learned
Tannhäuser's fate, and fallen beside the way.
And Wolfram, in the ghastly torchlight, saw
The white face of the Princess turned to his,
And for a space their eyes met; then she raised
One hand towards Heaven, and smiled as who should say,
"O friend, I journey unto God; farewell!"
But he could answer nothing; for his eyes
Were blinded by his tears, and through his tears
Dimly, as in a dream, he saw her borne
Up the broad granite steps that wind within
The palace; and his inner eye, entranced,
Saw in a vision four great Angels stand,
Expectant of her spirit, at the foot
Of flights of blinding brilliancy of stairs
Innumerable, that through the riven skies
Scaled to the City of the Saints of God.
Then, when thick night fell on his soul, and all
The vision fled, he solitary stood
A crazéd man within the castle-court;
Whence issuing, with wild eyes and wandering gait
He through the darkness, groaning, passed away.

All that lone night, along the haunted hills,
By dizzy brinks of mountain precipices,
He fleeted, aimless as an unused wind
That wastes itself about a wilderness.
Sometimes from low-browed caves, and hollow crofts,
Under the hanging woods, there came and went
A voice of wail upon the midnight air,
As of a lost soul mourning; and the voice
Was still the voice of his remembered friend.
Sometimes (so fancy mocked the fears she bred!)
He heard along the lone and eery land
Low demon laughters; and a sullen strain
Of horror swelled upon the breeze; and sounds
Of wizard dance, with shawm and timbrel, flew
Ever betwixt waste air and wandering cloud
O'er pathless peaks. Then, in the distance tolled,
Or seemed to toll, a knell: the breezes dropped:
And, in the sudden pause, that passing bell
With ghostly summons bade him back return
To where, till dawn, a shade among the shades
Of Wartburg, watching one lone tower, he saw
A light that waned with all his earthly hopes.
The calm Dawn came and from the eastern cliff,
Athwart the glistening slopes and cold green copse,
Called to him, careless of a grief not hers;
But he, from all her babbling birds, and all
Her vexing sunlight, with a weary heart
Drew close the darkness of the glens and glades
About him, flying through the forest deeps.
And day and night, dim eve and dewy dawn,
Three times returning, went uncared for by;
And thrice the double twilights rose and fell
About a land where nothing seemed the same,
At eve or dawn, as in the time gone by.
But, when the fourth day like a stranger slipped
To his unhonored grave, God's Angel passed

Across the threshold of the Landgrave's hall,
And in his bosom bore to endless peace
The weary spirit of Elizabeth.
Then, in that hour when Death with gentle hand
Had drooped the quiet eyelids o'er the eyes
That Wolfram loved, to Wolfram's heart there came
A calmness like the calmness of a grave
Walled safe from all the noisy walks of men
In some green place of peace where daisies grow.
His tears fell in the twilight with the dews,
Soft as the dews that with the twilight fell,
When, over scarred and weather-wounded walls,
Sharp-jaggéd mountain cones, and tangled quicks,
Eve's spirit, settling, laid the land to sleep
In skyey trance. Nor yet less soft to fuse
Memory with hope, and earth with heaven, to him,
Athwart the harsher anguish of that day,
There stole with tears the tender human sense
Of heavenly mercy. Through that milder mood,
Like waifs that float to shore when storms are spent,
Flowed to his heart old memories of his friend,
O'erwoven with the weed of other griefs,
Of other griefs for her that grieved no more—
And of that time when, like a blazing star
That moves and mounts between the Lyre and Crown,
Tannhäuser shone; ere sin came, and with sin
Sorrow. And now if yet Tannhäuser lived
None knew: and if he lived, what hope in life?
And if he lived no more, what rest in death?
But every way the dreadful doom of sin.
Thus, musing much on all the mystery
Of life, and death, and love that will not die,
He wandered forth, incurious of the way;
Which took the wont of other days, and wound
Along the valley. Now the nodding star
Of even, and the deep, the dewy hour
Held all the sleeping circle of the hills;
Nor any cloud the stainless heavens obscured,
Save where, o'er Hörsel folded in the frown
Of all his wicked woods, a fleecy fringe
Of vapor veiled the slowly sinking moon.
There, in the shade, the stillness, o'er his harp
Leaning, of love, and life, and death he sang
A song to which from all her aëry caves
The mountain echo murmured in her sleep.
But, as the last strain of his solemn song
Died off among the solitary stars,
There came in answer from the folded hills
A note of human woe. He turned, he looked
That way the sound came o'er the lonely air;
And, seeing, yet believed not that he saw,
But, nearer moving, saw indeed hard by,
Dark in the darkness of a neighboring hill,
Lying among the splintered stones and stubs
Flat in the fern, with limbs diffused as one
That, having fallen, cares to rise no more,
A pilgrim; all his weeds of pilgrimage
Hanging and torn, his sandals stained with blood
Of bruiséd feet, and, broken in his hand,
His wreathéd staff.
And Wolfram wistfully
Looked in his face, and knew it not.
"Alas!
Not him," he murmured, "not my friend!" And then,

"What art thou, pilgrim? whence thy way? how fall'n
In this wild glen? at this lone hour abroad
When only Grief is stirring?" Unto whom
That other, where he lay in the long grass,
Not rising, but with petulant gesture, "Hence!
Whate'er I am, it skills not. Thee I know
Full well, Sir Wolfram of the Willow-brook,
The well-beloved Singer!"
Like a dart
From a friend's hand that voice through Wolfram went:
For Memory over all the ravaged form
Wherefrom it issued, wandering, failed to find
The man she mourned; but Wolfram, to the voice
No stranger, started smit with pain, as all
The past on those sharp tones came back to break
His heart with hopeless knowledge. And he cried,
"Alas, my brother!" Such a change, so drear,
In all so unlike all that once he was
Showed the lost knight Tannhäuser, where he lay
Fallen across the split and morselled crags
Like a dismantled ruin. And Wolfram said,
"O lost! how comest thou, unabsolved, once more
Among these valleys visited by death,
And shadowed with the shadow of thy sin?"
Whereto in scorn Tannhäuser, "Be at rest,
O fearful in thy righteousness! not thee,
Nor grace of thine, I seek."
Speaking, he rose
The spectre of a beauty waned away;
And, like a hollow echo of himself
Mocking his own last words, he murmured, "Seek!
Alas! what seek I here, or anywhere?
Whose way of life is like the crumbled stair
That winds and winds about a ruined tower,
And leads nowhither!"

But Wolfram cried, "Yet turn!
For, as I live, I will not leave thee thus.
My life shall be about thee, and my voice
Lure scared Hope back to find a resting-place
Even in the jaws of Death. I do adjure thee,
By all that friendship yet may claim, declare
That, even though unabsolved, not uncontrite,
Thy soul no more hath lapsed into the snare
Of that disastrous sorcery. Bid me hail,
Seen through the darkness of thy desolation,
Some light of purer purpose; since I deem
Not void of purpose hast thou sought these paths
That range among the places of the past;
And I will make defeat of Grief with such
True fellowship of tears as shall disarm
Her right hand of its scorpions; nor in vain
My prayers with thine shall batter at the gates
Of Mercy, through all antagonisms of fate
Forcing sharp inlet to her throne in Heaven."

Whereat Tannhäuser, turning tearless eyes
On Wolfram, murmured mournfully, "If tears
Fiery as those from fallen seraphs distilled,
Or centuries of prayers for pardon sighed
Sad, as of souls in purgatorial glooms,
Might soften condemnation, or restore
To her, whom most on earth I have offended,
The holy freight of all her innocent hopes
Wrecked in this ruined venture, I would weep
Salt oceans from these eyes. But I no more
May drain the deluge from my heart, no more
On any breath of sigh or prayer rebuild
The rainbow of discovenanted Hope.
Thou, therefore, Wolfram — for her face, when mine

Is dark forever, thine eyes may still behold —
Tell her, if thou unblamed may'st speak of one
Signed cross by the curse of God and cancelled out,
How, at the last, though in remorse of all
That makes allegiance void and valueless,
To me has come, with knowledge of my loss,
Fealty to that pure passion, once betrayed,
Wherewith I loved, and love her."

There his voice,
Even as a wave that, touching on the shore
To which it travelled, is shivered and diffused,
Sank, scattered into spray of wasteful sighs,
And back dissolved into the deeper grief.

To whom, Wolfram, "O answer by the faith
In which mankind are kindred, art thou not
From Rome, unhappiest?" "From Rome? ah me!"
He muttered, "Rome is far off, very far,
And weary is the way!" But undeterred
Wolfram renewed, "And hast thou not beheld
The face of Christ's High Vicar?" And again,
"Pass on," he muttered, "what is that to thee?"
Whereto, with sorrowful voice, Wolfram,
"O all,
And all in all to me that love my friend!"
"My friend!" Tannhäuser laughed a bitter laugh
Then sadlier said, "What thou wouldst know, once known,
Will cause thee to recall that wasted word
And cancel all the kindness in thy thoughts;
Yet shalt thou learn my misery, and learn
The man so changed, whom once thou calledst 'friend,'
That unto him the memory of himself
Is as a stranger." Then, with eyes that swam
True sorrow, Wolfram stretched his arms and sought
To clasp Tannhäuser to him: but the other
Waved him away, and with a shout that sprang
Fierce with self-scorn from misery's deepest depth,
"Avaunt!" he cried, "the ground whereon I tread
Is ground accurst!
"Yet stand not so far off
But what thine ears, if yet they will, may take
The tale thy lips from mine have sought to learn;
Then, sign thyself, and peaceful go thy ways."
And Wolfram, for the grief that choked his voice,
Could only murmur "Speak!" But for a while
Tannhäuser to sad silence gave his heart;
Then fetched back some far thought, sighing, and said: —

"O Wolfram, by the love of lovelier days
Believe I am not so far fallen away
From all I was while we might yet be friends,
But what these words, haply my last, are true:
True as my heart's deep woe what time I felt
Cold on my brow tears wept, and wept in vain,
For me, among the scorn of altered friends,
Parting that day for Rome. Remember this:
That when, in the after years to which I pass
A by-word, and a mockery, and no more,
Thou, honored still by honorable men,
Shalt hear my name dishonored, thou may'st say,
'Greatly he grieved for that great sin he sinned.'

"Ever, as up the windy Alpine way,
We halting oft by cloudy convent doors,
My fellow-pilgrims warmed themselves within,
And ate and drank, and slept their sleep, all night,
I, fasting, slept not; but in ice and snow
Wept, aye remembering her that wept for me,
And loathed the sin within me. When at length
Our way lay under garden terraces

Strewn with their dropping blossoms, thick with scents,
Among the towers and towns of Italy,
Whose sumptuous airs along them, like the ghosts
Of their old gods, went sighing, I nor looked
Nor lingered, but with bandaged eyeballs prest,
Impatient, to the city of the shrine
Of my desired salvation. There by night
We entered. There, all night, forlorn I lay
Bruised, broken, bleeding, all my garments torn,
And all my spirit stricken with remorse,
Prostrate beneath the great cathedral stairs.
So the dawn found me. From a hundred spires
A hundred silvery chimes rang joy: but I
Lay folded in the shadow of my shame,
Darkening the daylight from me in the dust.
Then came a sound of solemn music flowing
To where I crouched; voices and trampling feet;
And, girt by all his crimson cardinals,
In all his pomp the sovran Pontiff stood
Before me in the centre of my hopes;
Which trembled round him into glorious shapes,
Golden, as clouds that ring the risen sun.
And all the people, all the pilgrims, fell
Low at his sacred feet, confessed their sins,
And, pardoned, rose with psalms of jubilee
And confident glad faces.
"Then I sprang
To where he paused above me; with wild hands
Clutched at the skirts I could not reach; and sank
Shiveringly back; crying, 'O holy, and high,
And terrible, that hast the keys of heaven!
Thou that dost bind and dost unloose, from me,
For Mary's sake, and the sweet saints', unbind
The grievous burthen of the curse I bear.'
And when he questioned, and I told him all
The sin that smouldered in my blood, how bred,
And all the strangeness of it, then his face
Was as the Judgment Angel's; and I hid
My own; and, hidden from his eyes, I heard:

"'Hast thou within the nets of Satan lain?
Hast thou thy soul to her perdition pledged?
Hast thou thy lip to Hell's Enchantress lent,
To drain damnation from her reeking cup?
Then know that sooner from the withered staff
That in my hand I hold green leaves shall spring,
Than from the brand in hell-fire scorched rebloom
The blossoms of salvation.'
"The voice ceased,
And, with it all things from my sense. I waked
I know not when, but all the place was dark:
Above me, and about me, and within
Darkness: and from that hour by moon or sun
Darkness unutterable as of death
Where'er I walk. But death himself is near!
O, might I once more see her, unseen; unheard,
Hear her once more; or know that she forgives
Whom Heaven forgives not, nor his own lost peace;
I think that even among the nether fires
And those dark fields of Doom to which I pass,
Some blessing yet would haunt me."
Sorrowfully
He rose among the tumbled rocks and leaned
Against the dark. As one that many a year,
Sundered by savage seas unsociable
From kin and country, in a desert isle
Dwelling till half dishumanized, beholds
Haply, one eve, a far-off sail go by,
That brings old thoughts of home across his heart;
And still the man who thinks — "They are all gone,
Or changed, that loved me once, and I myself

No more the same" — watches the dwindling speck
With weary eyes, nor shouts, nor waves a hand;
But after, when the night is left alone,
A sadness falls upon him, and he feels
More solitary in his solitudes,
And tears come starting fast; so, tearful, stood
Tannhäuser, whilst his melancholy thoughts,
From following up far off a waning hope,
Back to himself came, one by one, more sad
Because of sadness troubled.
Yet not long
He rested thus; but murmured, "Now, farewell:
I go to hide me darkly in the groves
That she was wont to haunt; where some sweet chance
Haply may yield me sight of her, and I
May stoop, she passed away, to kiss the ground
Made sacred by her passage ere I die."
But him departing Wolfram held,
"Vain! vain!
Thy footstep sways with fever, and thy mind
Wavers within thy restless eyes. Lie here,
O unrejected, in my arms, and rest!"

Now o'er the cumbrous hills began to creep
A thin and watery light: a whisper went
Vague through the vast and dusky-volumed woods,
And, uncompanioned, from a drowsy copse
Hard by a solitary chirp came cold,
While, spent with inmost trouble, Tannhäuser leaned
His wan cheek pillowed upon Wolfram's breast,
Calm, as in death, with placid lids down locked.
And Wolfram prayed within his heart,
"Ah, God!
Let him not die, not yet, not thus, with all
The sin upon his spirit!" But while he prayed
Tannhäuser raised delirious looks, and sighed,
"Hearest thou not the happy songs they sing me?
Seëst thou not the lovely floating forms?
O fair, and fairer far than fancy fashioned!
O sweet the sweetness of the songs they sing!
For thee, . . . they sing . . . the goddess waits: for thee
With braided blooms the balmy couch is strewn,
And loosed for thee . . . they sing . . . *the golden zone.*
Fragrant for thee the lighted spices fume
With streaming incense sweet, and sweet for thee
The scattered rose, the myrtle crown, the cup,
The nectar-cup for thee! . . . they sing. *Return,*
Though late, too long desired, . . . I hear them sing,
Delay no more delights too long delayed:
Turn to thy rest; . . . they sing . . . *the married doves*
Murmur; the Fays soft-sparkling tapers tend;
The odors burn the purple bowers among;
And Love for thee, and Beauty, waits!
. . . they sing."

"Ah me! ah madman!" Wolfram cried,
"yet cram
Thy cheated ears, nor chase with credulous heart
The fair dissembling of that dream. For thee
Not roses now, but thorns; nor myrtle wreath,
But cypress rather and the graveyard flower
Befitting saddest brows; nor nectar poured,
But prayers and tears! For thee in yonder skies
An Angel strives with Sin and Death; for thee
Yet pleads a spirit purer than thine own:
For she is gone! gone to the breast of God!
Thy Guardian Angel, while she walked the earth,
Thine intercessionary Saint while now
For thee she sues about the Throne of Thrones,
Beyond the stars, our star, Elizabeth!"

Then Wolfram felt the shattered frame that leaned
Across his breast with sudden spasms convulsed.

"Dead! is she dead?" Tannhäuser murmured, "dead!
Gone to the grave, so young! murdered — by me!
Dead — and by my great sin! O Wolfram, turn
Thy face from mine. I am a dying man!"
And Wolfram answered, "Dying? ah, not thus!
Yet make one sign thou dost repent the past,
One word, but one! to say thou hast abhorred
That false she-devil that, with her damnéd charms,
Hath wrought this ruin; and I, though all the world
Roar out against thee, ay! though fiends of hell
Howl from the deeps, yet I, thy friend, even yet
Will cry them 'Peace!' and trust the hope I hold
Against all desperate odds, and deem thee saved."
Whereto Tannhäuser, speaking faintly, "Friend,
The fiend that haunts in ruins through my heart
Will wander sometimes. In the nets I trip,
When most I fret the meshes. These spent shafts
Are of a sickly brain that shoots awry,
Aiming at something better. Bear with me.
I die: I pass I know not whither: yet know
That I die penitent. O Wolfram, pray,
Pray for my soul! I cannot pray myself.
I dare not hope: and yet I would not die
Without a hope, if any hope, though faint
And far beyond this darkness, yet may dwell
In the dear death of Him that died for all."
He whispering thus; far in the Aurorean East
The ruddy sun, uprising, sharply smote
A golden finger on the airy harps
By Morning hung within her leafy bowers;
And all about the budded dells, and woods
With sparkling-tasselled tops, from birds and brooks
A hundred hallelujahs hailed the light.
The whitethorn glistened from the wakening glen:
O'er golden gravel danced the dawning rills:
All the delighted leaves by copse and glade
Gambolled; and breezy bleatings came from flocks
Far off in pleasant pastures fed with dew.

But whilst, unconscious of the silent change
Thus stolen around him, o'er the dying bard
Hung Wolfram, on the breeze there came a sound
Of mourning moving down the narrow glen;
And, looking up, he suddenly was 'ware
Of four white maidens, moving in the van
Of four black monks who bore upon her bier
The flower-strewn corpse of young Elizabeth.
And after these, from all the castled hills,
A multitude of lieges and of lords;
A multitude of men-at-arms, with all
Their morions hung with mourning; and in midst
His worn cheek channelled with unwonted tears,
The Landgrave, weeping for Elizabeth.
These, as the sad procession nearer wound,
And nearer, trampling bare the feathery weed
To where Sir Wolfram rested o'er his friend,
Tannhäuser caught upon his dying gaze;
And caught, perchance, upon the inward eye,
Far, far beyond the corpse, the bier, and far
Beyond the widening circle of the sun,
Some sequel of that vision Wolfram saw:
The crownéd Spirit by the Jasper Gates;
The four white Angels o'er the walls of Heaven,
The shores where, tideless, sleep the seas of Time
Soft by the City of the Saints of God.

Forth, with the strength that lastly comes to break
All bonds, from Wolfram's folding arm he leapt,

Clambered the pebbly path, and, groaning, fell
Flat on the bier of love — his bourn at last!
Then, even then, while question question chased
About the ruffled circle of that grief,
And all was hubbub by the bier, a noise
Of shouts and hymns brake in across the hills,
That now o'erflowed with hurrying feet; and came,
Dashed to the hip with travel, and dewed with haste,
A flying post, and in his hand he bore
A withered staff o'erflourished with green leaves;
Who, — followed by a crowd of youth and eld,
That sang to stun with sound the lark in heaven,
"A miracle! a miracle from Rome!
Glory to God that makes the bare bough green!" —
Sprang in the midst, and, hot for answer, asked
News of the Knight Tannhäuser.
Then a monk
Of those that, stoled in sable, bore the bier
Pointing, with sorrowful hand, "Behold the man!"
But straight the other, "Glory be to God!
This from the Vicar of the fold of Christ:
The withered staff hath flourished into leaves,
The brand shall bloom, though burned with fire, and thou
— Thy soul from sin be saved!" To whom, with tears
That flashed from lowering lids, Wolfram replied:
"To him a swifter message, from a source
Mightier than whence thou comest, hath been vouchsafed.
See these stark hands, blind eyes, and bloodless lips,
This shattered remnant of a once fair form,
Late home of desolation, now the husk
And ruined chrysalis of a regal spirit
That up to heaven hath parted on the wing!
But thou, to Rome returning with hot speed,
Tell the high Vicar of the Fold of Christ
How that lost sheep his rescuing hand would reach,
Although by thee unfound, is found indeed,
And in the Shepherd's bosom lies at peace."

And they that heard him lifted up the voice
And wept. But they that stood about the hills
Far off, not knowing, ceased not to cry out,
"Glory to God that makes the bare bough green!"
Till Echo, from the inmost heart of all
That mellowing morn blown open like a rose
To round and ripen to the perfect noon,
Resounded, "Glory! glory!" and the rocks
From glen to glen rang, "Glory unto God!"

And so those twain, severed by Life and Sin,
By Love and Death united, in one grave
Slept. But Sir Wolfram passed into the wilds:
There, with long labor of his hands, he hewed
A hermitage from out the hollow rock,
Wherein he dwelt, a solitary man.
There, many a year, at nightfall or at dawn,
The pilgrim paused, nor ever paused in vain,
For words of cheer along his weary way.
But once, upon a windy night, men heard
A noise of rustling wings, and at the dawn
They found the hermit parted to his peace.
The place is yet. The youngest pilgrim knows,
And loves it. Three gray rocks; and, over these,
A mountain ash that, mourning, bead by bead,
Drops her red rosary on a ruined cell.

So sang the Saxon Bard. And when he ceased,
The women's cheeks were wet with tears; but all
The broad-blown Barons roared applause, and flowed
The jostling tankards prodigal of wine.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AGAMEMNON.
ÆGISTHUS.
ORESTES.
PHOCIAN.
HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.
ELECTRA.
CASSANDRA.
CHORUS.

SCENE. — *Before the Palace of Agamemnon in Argos. Trophies, amongst which the shield of Agamemnon, on the wall.*
TIME. — *Morning. The action continues till Sunset.*

I. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

MORNING at last! at last the lingering day
Creeps o'er the dewy side of yon dark world.
O dawning light already on the hills!
O universal earth, and air, and thou,
First freshness of the east, which art a breath
Breathed from the rapture of the gods, who bless
Almost all other prayers on earth but mine!
Wherefore to me is solacing sleep denied?
And honorable rest, the right of all?
So that no medicine of the slumbrous shell,
Brimmed with divinest draughts of melody,
Nor silence under dreamful canopies,
Nor purple cushions of the lofty couch
May lull this fever for a little while.
Wherefore to me, — to me, of all mankind,
This retribution for a deed undone?
For many men outlive their sum of crimes,
And eat, and drink, and lift up thankful hands,
And take their rest securely in the dark.
Am I not innocent, — or more than these?
There is no blot of murder on my brow,
Nor any taint of blood upon my robe.
— It is the thought! it is the thought! . . . and men
Judge us by acts! . . . as though one thunder-clap
Let all Olympus out. Unquiet heart,
Ill fares it with thee since, ten sad years past,
In one wild hour of unacquainted joy,
Thou didst set wide thy lonely bridal doors
For a forbidden guest to enter in!
Last night, methought pale Helen, with a frown,
Swept by me, murmuring, "I — such as thou —
A Queen in Greece — weak-hearted, (woe is me!)
Allured by love — did, in an evil hour,
Fall off from duty. Sorrow came. Beware!"
And then, in sleep, there passed a baleful band, —
The ghosts of all the slaughtered under Troy,
From this side Styx, who cried, "For such a crime
We fell from our fair palaces on earth,
And wander, starless, here. For such a crime
A thousand ships were launched, and tumbled down
The topless towers of Ilion, though they rose
To magic music, in the time of Gods!"
With such fierce thoughts forevermore at war,

"Morning at last! at last the lingering day." Page 300.

Vext not alone by hankering wild regrets,
But fears, yet worse, of that which soon must come,
My heart waits armed, and from the citadel
Of its high sorrow, sees far off dark shapes,
And hears the footsteps of Necessity
Tread near, and nearer, hand in hand with Woe.
Last night the flaming Herald warning urged
Up all the hills, — small time to pause and plan!
Counsel is weak: and much remains to do,
That Agamemnon, and, if else remain
Of that enduring band who sailed for Troy
Ten years ago (and some sailed Lethe-ward),
Find us not unprepared for their return.

But — hark! I hear the tread of nimble feet
That sound this way. The rising town is poured
About the festive altars of the Gods,
And from the heart of the great Agora,
Lets out its gladness for this last night's news.
— Ah, so it is! Insidious, sly Report,
Sounding oblique, like Loxian oracles,
Tells double-tongued (and with the self-same voice!)
To some new gladness, new despair to some.

II. CHORUS AND CLYTEMNESTRA.

CHORUS.

O dearest Lady, daughter of Tyndarus!
With purple flowers we come, and offerings —
Oil, and wine; and cakes of honey,
Soothing, unadulterate; tapestries
Woven by white Argive maidens,
God-descended (woven only
For the homeward feet of Heroes)
To celebrate this glad intelligence
Which last night the fiery courier
Brought us, posting up from Ilion,
Wheeled above the dusky circle
Of the hills from lighted Ida.
For now (Troy lying extinguisht
Underneath a mighty Woe)
Our King and chief of men,
Agamemnon, returning
(And with him the hope of Argos),
Shall worship at the Tutelary Altars
Of their dear native land:
In the fane of ancient Herë,
Or the great Lycæan God;
Immortally crowned with reverend honor!
But tell us wherefore, O godlike woman,
Having a lofty trouble in your eye,
You walk alone with loosened tresses?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall the ship toss, and yet the helm not heave?
Shall they drowse sitting at the lower oars,
When those that hold the middle benches wake?
He that is yet sole eye of all our state
Shining not here, shall ours be shut in dreams?
But haply you (thrice happy!) prove not this,
The curse of Queens, and worse than widowed wives —
To wake, and hear, all night, the wandering gnat
Sing through the silent chambers, while Alarm,
In place of Slumber, by the haunted couch
Stands sentinel; or when from coast to coast
Wails the night-wandering wind, or when o'er heaven
Boötes hath unleashed his fiery hounds,
And Night her glittering camps hath set, and lit
Her watch-fires through the silence of the skies,
— To count ill chances in the dark, and feel
Deserted pillows wet with tears, not kisses,
Where kisses once fell.
But now Expectation
Stirs up such restless motions of the blood
As suffer not my lids to harbor sleep.
Wherefore, O beloved companions,
I wake betimes, and wander up and down,
Looking toward the distant hill-tops,
From whence shall issue fair fulfilment
Of all our ten-years' hoping. For, behold!

Troy being captived, we shall see once more
Those whom we loved in days of old.
Yet some will come not from the Phrygian shore,
But there lie weltering to the surf and wind;
Exiled from day, in darkness blind,
Or having crost unhappy Styx.
And some who left us full of vigorous youth
Shall greet us now gray-headed men.
But if our eyes behold again
Our long-expected chief, in truth,
Fortune for us hath thrown the Treble Six.

CHORUS.

By us, indeed, these things are also wisht.
Wherefore, if now to this great son of Atreus
(Having survived the woful walls of Troy),
With us, once more, the Gods permit to stand
A glad man by the pillars of his hearth,
Let his dear life henceforth be such wherein
The Third Libation often shall be poured.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And let his place be numbered with the Gods,
Who overlook the world's eternal walls,
Out of all reach of sad calamities.

CHORUS

It is not well, I think, that men should set
Too near the Gods any of mortal kind:
But brave men are as Gods upon the earth.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And whom Death daunts not, these are truly brave.

CHORUS.

But more than all I reckon that man blest,
Who, having sought Death nobly, finds it not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Except he find it where he does not seek.

CHORUS.

You speak in riddles.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

For so Wisdom speaks.
But now do you with garlands wreathe the altars,
While I, within, the House prepare.
That so our King, at his returning,
With his golden armament,
Find us not unaware
Of the greatness of the event.

CHORUS.

Soon shall we see the faces that we loved.
Brother once more clasping brother,
As in the unforgotten days:
And heroes, meeting one another
(Men by glorious toils approved)
Where once they roved,
Shall rove again the old familiar ways.
And they that from the distance come
Shall feed their hearts with tales of home;
And tell the famous story of the war,
Rumored sometime from afar.
Now shall these again behold
The ancient Argos; and the grove
Long since trod
By the frenzied child of Inachus;
And the Forum, famed of old,
Of the wolf-destroying God;
And the opulent Mycenæ,
Home of the Pelopidæ,
While they rove with those they love,
Holding pleasant talk with us.
O how gloriously they went,
That avenging armament!
As though Olympus in her womb
No longer did entomb
The greatness of a bygone world —
Gods and godlike men —
But cast them forth again
To frighten Troy: such storm was hurled
On her devoted towers
By the retributive Deity,
Whosoe'er he be
Of the Immortal Powers —
Or maddening Pan, if he chastise
His Shepherd's Phrygian treacheries;
Or vengeful Loxias; or Zeus,
Angered for the shame and abuse
Of a great man's hospitality.

As wide as is Olympus' span
Is the power of the high Gods;

Who, in their golden blest abodes
See all things, looking from the sky;
And Heaven is hard to pacify
For the wickedness of man.
My heart is filled with vague forebodings,
And opprest by unknown terrors
Lest, in the light of so much gladness,
Rise the shadow of ancient wrong.
O Dæmon of the double lineage
Of Tantalus; and the Pleisthenidæ,
Inexorable in thy mood,
On the venerable threshold
Of the ancient House of Pelops
Surely is enough of blood!
Wherefore does my heart misgive me?
Wherefore comes this doubt to grieve me?
O, may no Divine Envy
Follow home the Argive army,
Being vext for things ill-done
In wilful pride of stubborn war,
Long since, in the distant lands!
May no Immortal wrath pursue
Our dear King, the Light of Argos,
For the unhappy sacrifice
Of a daughter; working evil
In the dark heart of a woman;
Or some household treachery,
And a curse from kindred hands!

III. CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

[Re-entering from the house.

To-morrow . . . ay, what if to-day? . . .
Well — then?
Why, if those tongues of flame, with which last night
The land was eloquent, spoke certain truth,
By this perchance through green Saronic rocks
Those black ships glide . . . perchance . . . well, what 's to fear?
'T were well to dare the worst — to know the end —
Die soon, or live secure. What 's left to add
To years of nights like those which I have known?
Shall I shrink now to meet one little hour
Which I have dared to contemplate for years?
By all the Gods, not so! The end crowns all,
Which if we fail to seize, that 's also lost
Which went before: as who would lead a host
Through desolate dry places, yet return
In sight of kingdoms, when the Gods are roused
To mark the issue? . . . And yet, yet — I think
Three nights ago there must have been sea-storms.
The wind was wild among the Palace towers:
Far off upon the hideous Element
I know it huddled up the petulant waves,
Whose shapeless and bewildering precipices
Led to the belly of Orcus . . . O, to slip
Into dark Lethe from a dizzy plank,
When even the Gods are reeling on the poop!
To drown at night, and have no sepulchre! —
That were too horrible! . . . yet it may be
Some easy chance, that comes with little pain,
Might rid me of the haunting of those eyes,
And these wild thoughts . . . To know he roved among
His old companions in the Happy Fields,
And ranged with heroes — I still innocent!
Sleep would be natural then.
Yet will the old time
Never return! never those peaceful hours!
Never that careless heart! and nevermore,
Ah, nevermore that laughter without pain!
But I, that languish for repose, must fly it,
Nor, save in daring, doing, taste of rest.
O, to have lost all these! To have bartered calm,
And all the irrevocable wealth of youth,
And gained . . . what? But this change had surely come,
Even were all things other than they are.
I blame myself o'ermuch, who should blame time,
And life's inevitable loss, and fate,
And days grown lovelier in the retrospect.
We change: wherefore look back? The path to safety
Lies forward . . . forward ever.

[*In passing toward the house she recognizes the shield of Agamemnon, and pauses before it.*

Ha! old shield,
Hide up for shame that honest face of thine.
Stare not so bluntly at us . . . O, this man!
Why sticks the thought of him so in my heart?
If I had loved him once — if for one hour —
Then were there treason in this falling off.
But never did I feel this wretched heart
Until it leaped beneath Ægisthus' eyes.
Who could have so forecounted all from first?
From that flusht moment when his hand in mine
Rested a thought too long, a touch too kind,
To leave its pulse unwarmed . . . but I remember
I dreamed sweet dreams that night, and slept till dawn,
And woke with flutterings of a happy thought,
And felt, not worse, but better . . . and now . . . now?
When first a strange and novel tenderness
Quivered in these salt eyes, had one said then
"A bead of dew may drag a deluge down": —
In that first pensive pause, through which I watched
Unwonted sadness on Ægisthus' brows,
Had some one whispered, "Ay, the summer-cloud
Comes first: the tempest follows." — Well, what's past
Is past. Perchance the worst 's to follow yet.
How thou art hackt, and hewn, and bruised, old shield!
Was the whole edge of the war against one man?
But one thrust more upon this dexter ridge
Had quite cut through the double inmost hide.
He must have stood to it well! O, he was cast
I' the mould of Titans: a magnificent man,
With head and shoulders like a God's. He seemed
Too brimful of this merry vigorous life
To spill it all out at one stab o' the sword.
Yet that had helped much ill . . . O Destiny
Makes cowards or makes culprits of us all!
Ah, had some Trojan weapon . . . Fool! fool! fool!
Surely sometimes the unseen Eumenides
Do prompt our musing moods with wicked hints,
And lash us for our crimes ere we commit them.
Here, round this silver boss, he cut my name,
Once — long ago: he cut it as he lay
Tired out with brawling pastimes — prone — his limbs
At length diffused — his head droopt in my lap —
His spear flung by: Electra by the hearth
Sat with the young Orestes on her knee;
While he, with an old broken sword, hacked out
These crooked characters, and laughed to see
(Sprawled from the unused strength of his large hands)
The marks make CLYTEMNESTRA. How he laughed!
Ægisthus' hands are smaller. Yet I know
That matrons envied me my husband's strength.
And I remember when he strode among
The Argive crowd he topped them by a head,
And tall men stood wide-eyed to look at him,
Where his great plumes went tossing up and down
The brazen prores drawn out upon the sand.
War on his front was graved, as on thy disk,
Shield! which he left to keep his memory
Grand in men's mouths: that some revered old man,
Winning to this the eyes of our hot youth,
Might say, "'T was here, and here — this dent, and that —
On such, and such a field (which we remember)
That Agamemnon, in the great old time,
Held up the battle."

Now lie there, and rust!
Thy uses all have end. Thy master's home
Should harbor none but friends.
O triple brass,
Iron, and oak! the blows of blundering men
Clang idly on you: what fool's strength is yours!
For, surely, not the adamantine tunic
Of Ares, nor whole shells of blazing plates,
Nor ashen spear, nor all the cumbrous coil
Of seven bulls' hides may guard the strongest king
From one defenceless woman's quiet hate.

What noise was that? Where can Ægisthus be?
Ægisthus! — my Ægisthus! . . . There again!
Louder, and longer — from the Agora —
A mighty shout: and now I see i' the air
A rolling dust the wind blows near. Ægisthus!
O much I fear . . . this wild-willed race of ours
Doth ever, like a young unbroken colt,
Chafe at the straightened bridle of our state —
If they should find him lone, irresolute,
As is his wont . . . I know he lacks the eye
And forehead wherewith crowned Capacity
Awes rash Rebellion back.
Again that shout!
Gods keep Ægisthus safe! myself will front
This novel storm. How my heart leaps to danger!
I have been so long a pilot on rough seas,
And almost rudderless!
O yet 't is much
To feel a power, self-centred, self-assured,
Bridling a glorious danger! as when one
That knows the nature of the elements
Guides some frail plank with sublime skill that wins
Progress from all obstruction; and, erect,
Looks bold and free down all the dripping stars,
Hearing the hungry storm boom baffled, by.

Ægisthus! . . . hark! . . . Ægisthus! . . . there . . . Ægisthus!
I would to all the Gods I knew him safe!
Who comes this way, guiding his racing feet
Safe to us, like a nimble charioteer?

IV. CLYTEMNESTRA. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, gloom-bird! are there prodigies about?
What new ill-thing sent thee before?

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Speak, if thou hast a voice! I listen.

HERALD.

O Queen —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hath an ox trodden on thy tongue? . . . Speak then!

HERALD.

O Queen (for haste hath caught away my breath),
The King is coming.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Say again — the King
Is coming —

HERALD.

Even now, the broad sea-fields
Grow white with flocks of sails, and toward the west
The sloped horizon teems with rising beaks.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The people know this?

HERALD.

Heard you not the noise?
For soon as this winged news had toucht the gate
The whole land shouted in the sun.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So soon!
The thought 's outsped by the reality,
And halts agape . . . the King —

HERALD.

How she is moved.
A noble woman!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Wherefore beat so fast,
Thou foolish heart? 't is not thy master —

HERALD.

Truly
She looks all over Agamemnon's mate.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Destiny, Destiny! The deed 's half done.

HERALD.

She will not speak, save by that brooding eye
Whose light is language. Some great thought, I see,
Mounts up the royal chambers of her blood,
As a king mounts his palace; holds high pomp
In her Olympian bosom; gains her face,
Possesses all her noble glowing cheek
With sudden state; and gathers grandly up
Its slow majestic meanings in her eyes!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So quick this sudden joy hath taken us,
I scarce can realize the sum of it.
You say the King comes here, — the King, my husband,
Whom we have waited for ten years, — O joy!
Pardon our seeming roughness at the first.
Hope, that will often fawn upon despair
And flatter desperate chances, when the event
Falls at our feet, soon takes a querulous tone,
And jealous of that perfect joy she guards
(Lest the ambrosial fruit by some rude hand
Be stol'n away from her, and never tasted),
Barks like a lean watch-dog at all who come.
But now do you, with what good speed you may,
Make known this glad intelligence to all.
Ourselves, within as best befits a wife
And woman, will prepare my husband's house.
Also, I pray you, summon to our side
Our cousin, Ægisthus. We would speak with him.
We would that our own lips should be the first
To break these tidings to him; so obtaining
New joy by sharing his. And, for yourself,
Receive our gratitude. For this great news
Henceforth you hold our royal love in fee.
Our fairest fortunes from this day I date,
And to the House of Tantalus new honor.

HERALD.

She 's gone! With what a majesty she filled
The whole of space! The statues of the Gods
Are not so godlike. She has Herë's eyes,
And looks immortal!

V. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*as she ascends the steps of the Palace*).

So . . . while on the verge
Of some wild purpose we hang dizzily,
Weighing the danger of the leap below
Against the danger of retreating steps,
Upon a sudden, some forecast event,
Issuing full-armed from Councils of the Gods,
Strides to us, plucks us by the hair, and hurls
Headlong pale conscience, to the abyss of crime.
Well — I shrink not. 'T is but a leap in life.
There 's fate in this. Why is he here so soon?
The sight of whose abhorréd eyes will add
Whatever lacks of strength to this resolve.
Away with shame! I have had enough of it.
What 's here for shame? . . . the weak against the strong?
And if the weak be victor? . . . what of that?

Tush! . . . there, — my soul is set to it.
What need
Of argument to justify an act
Necessity compels, and must absolve?
I have been at play with scruples — like a girl.
Now they are all flung by. I have talked with Crime
Too long to play the prude. These thoughts have been
Wild guests by night. Now I shall dare to do
That which I did not dare to think . . .
O, now
I know myself! Crime's easier than we dream.

CHORUS.

Upon the everlasting hills
Thronéd Justice works, and waits.
Between the shooting of a star,
That falls unseen on summer nights
Out of the bosom of the dark,
And the magnificent march of War,
Rolled from angry lands afar
Round some dooméd city-gates,
Nothing is to her unknown;

Nothing unseen.
Upon her hills she sits alone,
And in the balance of Eternity
Poises against the What-has-been
The weight of What-shall-be.
She sums the account of human ills.
The great world's hoarded wrongs and rights
Are in her treasures. She will mark,
With inward-searching eyes sublime,
The frauds of Time.
The empty future years she fills
Out of the past. All human wills
Sway to her on her reachless heights.

Wisdom she teaches men, with tears,
In the toilful school of years:
Climbing from event to event.
And, being patient, is content
To stretch her sightless arms about,
And find some human instrument,
From many sorrows to work out
Her doubtful, far accomplishment.

She the two Atridæ sent
Upon Ilion: being intent
The heapt-up wrath of Heaven to move
Against the faithless Phrygian crime.
Them the Thunder-bird of Jove,
Swooping sudden from above,
Summoned to fates sublime.

She, being injured, for the sake
Of her, the often-wedded wife,
(Too loved, and too adoring!)
Many a brazen band did break
In many a breathless battle-strife;
Many a noble life did take;
Many a headlong agony,
Frenzied shout, and frantic cry,
For Greek and Trojan storing.
When, the spear in the onset being shivered,
The reeling ranks were rolled together
Like mad waves mingling in windy weather,
Dasht fearfully over and over each other.
And the plumes of Princes were tossed and thrust,
And dragged about in the shameful dust;
And the painful, panting breath
Came and went in the tug of death:
And the sinews were loosened, and the strong knees stricken:
And the eyes began to darken and thicken:
And the arm of the mighty and terrible quivered.

O Love! Love! Love! How terrible art thou!
How terrible!
O, what hast thou to do
With men of mortal years,
Who toil below,
And have enough of griefs for tears to flow?
O, range in higher spheres!
Hast thou, O hast thou, no diviner hues
To paint thy wings, but must transfuse
An Iris-light from tears?
For human hearts are all too weak to hold thee.
And how, O Love, shall human arms infold thee?
There is a seal of sorrow on thy brow.
There is a deadly fire in thy breath.
With life thou lurest, yet thou givest death.
O Love, the Gods are weak by reason of thee;
And many wars have been upon the earth.
Thou art the sweetest source of saltest sorrows.

Thy blest to-days bring such unblest to-
morrows;
Thy softest hope makes saddest memory.
Thou hadst destruction in thee from the
birth;
Incomprehensible!

O Love, thy brightest bridal garments
Are poisoned, like that robe of agonies
Which Deianira wove for Hercules,
And, being put on, turn presently to
cerements!

Thou art unconquered in the fight.
Thou rangest over land and sea.
O let the foolish nations be!
Keep thy divine desire
To upheave mountains or to kindle
fire
From the frore frost, and set the world
alight.
Why make thy red couch in the damask
cheek?
Or light thy torch at languid eyes?
Or lie entangled in soft sighs
On pensive lips that will not speak?
To sow the seeds of evil things
In the hearts of headstrong kings?
Preparing many a kindred strife
For the fearful future hour?
O leave the wretched race of man,
Whose days are but the dying seasons'
span;
Vex not his painful life!
Make thy immortal sport
In Heaven's high court,
And cope with Gods that are of equal
power.

VI. ELECTRA. CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ELECTRA.

Now is at hand the hour of retribution.
For my father, at last returning,
In great power, being greatly injured,
Will destroy the base adulterer,
And efface the shameful Past.

CHORUS.

O child of the Godlike Agamemnon!
Leave vengeance to the power of Heaven;
Nor forestall with impious footsteps
The brazen tread of black Erinnys.

ELECTRA.

Is it, besotted with the adulterous sin,
Or, as with flattery pleasing present
power,
Or, being intimidate, you speak these
words?

CHORUS.

Nay, but desiring justice, like yourself.

ELECTRA.

Yet Justice ofttimes uses mortal means.

CHORUS.

But flings aside her tools when work is
done.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O dearest friends, inform me, went this
way
Ægisthus?

CHORUS.

Even now, hurrying hitherward
I see him walk, with irritated eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A reed may show which way the tem-
pest blows.
That face is pale, — those brows are dark
. . . ah!

VII. ÆGISTHUS. CLYTEMNESTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Agamemnon —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My husband . . . well?

ÆGISTHUS.

(Whom may the great Gods curse!)
Is scarce an hour hence.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Then that hour 's yet saved
From sorrow. Smile, Ægisthus —

ÆGISTHUS.

Hear me speak.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not as your later wont has been to
smile —

Quick, fierce, as though you scarce could hurry out
The wild thing fast enough ; for smiling's sake,
As if to show you could smile, though in fear
Of what might follow, — but as first you smiled
Years, years ago, when some slow loving thought
Stole down your face, and settled on your lips,
As though a sunbeam halted on a rose,
And mixed with fragrance, light. Can you smile still
Just so, Ægisthus ?

ÆGISTHUS.

These are idle words,
And like the wanderings of some fevered brain :
Extravagant phrases, void of import, wild.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, no ! you cannot smile so, more. Nor I !

ÆGISTHUS.

Hark ! in an hour the King—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Hush ! listen now, —
I hear, far down yon vale, a shepherd piping
Hard by his milk-white flock. The lazy things !
How quietly they sleep or feed among
The dry grass and the acanthus there ! . . . and he,
He hath flung his faun-skin by, and white-ash stick,
You hear his hymn ? Something of Dryope.
Faunus, and Pan . . . an old wood tale, no doubt !
It makes me think of songs when I was young
I used to sing between the valleys there,
Or higher up among the red ash-berries,
Where the goats climb, and gaze. Do you remember
That evening when we lingered all alone,
Below the city, and one yellow star
Shook o'er yon temple ? . . . ah, and you said then,
"Sweet, should this evening never change to night,
But pause, and pause, and stay just so, — yon star
Still steadfast, and the moon behind the hill,
Still rising, never risen, — would this seem strange ?
Or should we say, 'why halts the day so late ?'"
Do you remember ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Woman ! woman ! this
Surpasses frenzy ! Not a breath of time
Between us and the clutch of Destiny, —
Already sound there footsteps at our heels,
Already comes a heat against our cheek,
Already fingers cold among our hair,
And you speak lightly thus, as though the day
Lingered toward nuptial hours ! . . . awake ! arouse !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I do wake . . . well, the King —

ÆGISTHUS.

Even while we speak
Draws near. And we —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Must meet him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Meet ? ay . . . how ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

As mortals should meet fortune — calmly.

ÆGISTHUS.

Quick !
Consult ! consult ! Yet there is time to choose
The path to follow.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I have chosen it
Long since.

ÆGISTHUS.

How ? —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, have we not had ten years
To ripen counsel, and mature resolve ?
What 's to add now ?

ÆGISTHUS.

I comprehend you not.
The time is plucking at our sleeve.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus,
There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up
All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time. Upon this awful strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is not yet.
The Gods allot to us a little space,
Before the contests which must soon begin,
For calmer breathing. All before lies dark,
And difficult, and perilous, and strange;
And all behind . . . What if we take one look,
One last long lingering look (before Despair,
The shadow of failure, or remorse, which often
Waits on success, can come 'twixt us and it,
And darken all) at that which yet must seem
Undimmed in the long retrospect of years, —
The beautiful imperishable Past!
Were this not natural, being innocent now
— At least of that which is the greater crime?
To-night we shall not be so.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ah, to-night!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

All will be done which now the Gods foresee.
The sun shines still.

ÆGISTHUS.

I oft have marked some day
Begin all gold in its flusht orient,
With splendid promise to the waiting world,
And turn to blackness ere the sun ran down.
So draws our love to its dark close. To-night —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Shall bring our bridals, my Beloved! For, either
Upon the melancholy shores of Death
(One shadow near the doors of Pluto) greeted
By pale Proserpina, our steps shall be,
Or else, secure, in the great empty palace
We shall sleep crowned — no noise to startle us —
And Argos silent round us — all our own!

ÆGISTHUS.

In truth I do not dare to think this thing.
For all the Greeks will hate us.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What of that?
If that they do not harm us, — as who shall?

ÆGISTHUS.

Moreover, though we triumph in the act
(And we may fail, and fall) we shall go down
Covered with this reproach into the tomb,
Hunted by all the red Eumenides;
And, in the end, the ghost of him we slew,
Being beforehand there, will come between
Us and the awful Judges of the dead!
And no one on this earth will pray for us;
And no hand will hang garlands on our urns,
Either of man, or maid, or little child;
But we shall be dishonored.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O faint heart!
When this poor life of ours is done with — all
Its foolish days put by — its bright and dark —
Its praise and blame — rolled quite away — gone o'er

Like some brief pageant — will it stir us more,
Where we are gone, how men may hoot or shout
After our footsteps, than the dust and garlands
A few mad boys and girls fling in the air
When a great host is passed, can cheer or vex
The minds of men already out of sight
Toward other lands, with pæan and with pomp
Arrayed near vaster forces? For the future,
We will smoke hecatombs, and build new fanes,
And be you sure the gods deal leniently
With those who grapple for their life, and pluck it
From the closed grip of Fate, albeit perchance
Some ugly smutch, some drop of blood or so,
A spot here, there a streak, or stain of gore,
Should in the contest fall to them, and mar
That life's original whiteness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Tombs have tongues
That talk in Hades. Think it! Dare we hope,
This done, to be more happy?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My Beloved,
We are not happy, — we may never be,
Perchance, again. Yet it is much to think
We have been so: and even though we must weep,
We have enjoyed.
The roses and the thorns
We have pluckt together. We have proved both. Say,
Was it not worth the bleeding hands they left us
To have won such flowers? And if 't were possible
To keep them still, — keep even the withered leaves,
Even the withered leaves are worth our care.
We will not tamely give up life, — such life!
What though the years before, like those behind,
Be dark as clouds the thunder sits among,
Tipt only here and there with a wan gold
More bright for rains between? — 't is much, — 't is more,
For we shall ever think "the sun 's behind.
The sun must shine before the day goes down!"
Anything better than the long, long night,
And that perpetual silence of the tomb!
'T is not for happier hours, but life itself
Which may bring happier hours, we strike at Fate.
Why, though from all the treasury of the Past
'T is but one solitary gem we save —
One kiss more such as we have kist, one smile,
One more embrace, one night more such as those
Which we have shared, how costly were the prize,
How richly worth the attempt! Indeed, I know,
When yet a child, in those dim pleasant dreams
A girl will dream, perchance in twilit hours,
Or under eve's first star (when we are young
Happiness seems so possible, — so near!
One says, "it must go hard, but I shall find it!")
Ofttimes I mused, — "My life shall be my own,
To make it what I will." It is their fault
(I thought) who miss the true delights. I thought
Men might have saved themselves: they flung away,
Too easily abasht, life's opening promise:
But all things will be different for me.
For I felt life so strong in me! indeed
I was so sure of my own power to love
And to enjoy, — I had so much to give,
I said, "be sure it must win something back!"
Youth is so confident! And though I saw
All women sad, — not only those I knew,

As Helen (whom from youth I knew, nor ever
Divined that sad impenetrable smile
Which oft would darken through her lustrous eyes,
As drawing slowly down o'er her cold cheek
The yellow braids of odorous hair, she turned
From Menelaus praising her, and sighed, —
That was before he, flinging bitterly down
The trampled parsley-crown and undrained goblet,
Cursed before all the Gods his sudden shame
And young Hermione's deserted youth!)
Not only her, — but all whose lives I learned,
Medea, Deianira, Ariadne,
And many others, — all weak, wronged, opprest,
Or sick and sorrowful, as I am now, —
Yet in their fate I would not see my own,
Nor grant allegiance to that general law
From which a few, I knew a very few,
With whom it seemed I also might be numbered,
Had yet escaped securely: — so exempting
From this world's desolation everywhere
One fate — my own!
Well, that was foolish! Now
I am not so exacting. As we move
Further and further down the path of fate
To the sure tomb, we yield up, one by one,
Our claims on Fortune, till with each new year
We seek less and go further to obtain it.
'T is the old tale, — aye, all of us must learn it!
But yet I would not empty-handed stand
Before the House of Hades. Still there 's life,
And hope with life; and much that may be done.
Look up, O thou most dear and cherisht head!
We 'll strive still, conquering; or, if falling, fall
In sight of grand results.

ÆGISTHUS.

May these things be!
I know not. All is vague. I should be strong
Even were you weak. 'T is otherwise, — I see
No path to safety sure. We have done ill things.
Best let the past be past, lest new griefs come.
Best we part now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Part! what, to part from thee!
Never till death, — not in death even, part!

ÆGISTHUS.

But one course now is left.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And that is —

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

I care not.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Flight! I am a Queen.
A goddess once you said, — and why not goddess?
Seeing the Gods are mightier than we
By so much more of courage. O, not I,
But you, are mad.

ÆGISTHUS.

Nay, wiser than I was.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And you will leave me?

ÆGISTHUS.

Not if you will come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This was the Atlas of the world I built!

ÆGISTHUS.

Flight! . . . yes, I know not . . . somewhere . . . anywhere.
You come? . . . you come not? . . . well! . . . no time to pause!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And this is he — this he, the man I loved!
And this is retribution! O my heart!
O Agamemnon, how art thou avenged!
And I have done so much for him! . . . would do
So much! . . . a universe lies ruined here.
Now by Apollo, be a man for once!
Be for once strong, or be forever weak!
If shame be dead, and honor be no more,
No more true faith, nor that which in old time
Made us like Gods, sublime in our high place,
Yet all surviving instincts warn from flight.
Flight! — O, impossible! Even now the steps
Of fate are at the threshold. Which way fly?
For every avenue is barred by death.
Will these not scout your flying heels? If now
They hate us powerful, will they love us weak?
No land is safe; nor any neighboring king
Will harbor Agamemnon's enemy.
Reflect on Troy; her ashes smoulder yet.

ÆGISTHUS.

Her words compel me with their awful truth.
For so would vengeance hound and earth us down.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

If I am weak to move you by that love
You swore long since — and sealed it with false lips! —
Yet lives there nothing of the ambitious will?
Of those proud plots, and dexterous policy,
On which you builded such high hopes, and swore
To rule this people Agamemnon rules;
Supplant him eminent on his own throne,
And push our power through Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

The dream was great.
It was a dream. We dreamt it like a king.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, and shall so fulfil it — like a King!
Who talks of flight? For now, bethink you well,
If to live on, the byword of a world,
Be any gain, even such flight offers not.
Will long-armed Vengeance never find you out
When you have left the weapon in her hands?
Be bold, and meet her! Who forestall the bolts
Of heaven, the Gods deem worthy of the Gods.
Success is made the measure of our acts.
And, think, Ægisthus, there has been one thought
Before us in the intervals of years,
Between us ever in the long dark nights,
When, lying all awake, we heard the wind.
Did you shrink then? or, only closer drawing
Your lips to mine, your arms about my neck,
Say, "Who would fear such chances, when he saw
Behind them such a prize for him as this?"
Do you shrink now? Dare you put all this from you?
Revoke the promise of those years, and say
This prospect meets you unprepared at last?
Our motives are so mixt in their beginnings
And so confused, we recognize them not
Till they are grown to acts; but ne'er were ours
So blindly wov'n, but what we both untangled
Out of the intricacies of the heart
One purpose: — being found, best grapple to it.
For to conceive ill deeds yet dare not do them,
This is not virtue, but a twofold shame.
Between the culprit and the demigod
There 's but one difference men regard — success.
The weakly-wicked shall be doubly damned!

ÆGISTHUS.

I am not weak . . . what will you? . . . O, too weak

To bear this scorn! . . . She is a godlike fiend,
And hell and heaven seem meeting in her eyes.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Those who on perilous ventures once embark
Should burn their ships, nor ever dream return.
Better, though all Olympus marched on us,
To die like fallen Titans, scorning Heaven,
Than live like slaves in scorn of our own selves!

ÆGISTHUS.

We wait then? Good! and dare this desperate chance.
And if we fall (as we, I think, must fall)
It is but some few sunny hours we lose,
Some few bright days. True! and a little less
Of life, or else of wrong a little more,
What 's that? For one shade more or less the night
Will scarce seem darker or lighter, — the long night!
We 'll fall together, if we fall; and if —
O, if we live! —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, that was noblier thought.
Now you grow back into yourself, your true self.
My King! my chosen! my glad careless helpmate
In the old time! we shared its pleasant days
Royally, did we not? How brief they were!
Nor will I deem you less than what I know
You have it in you to become, for this
Strange freakish fear, — this passing brief alarm.
Do I not know the noble steed will start
Aside, scared lightly by a straw, a shadow,
A thorn-bush in the way, while the dull mule
Plods stupidly adown the dizziest paths?
And oft indeed, such trifles will dismay
The finest and most eager spirits, which yet
Daunt not a duller mind. O love, be sure
Whate'er betide, whether for well or ill,
Thy fate and mine are bound up in one skein;
Clotho must cut them both inseparate.
You dare not leave me — had you wings for flight!
You shall not leave me! You are mine, indeed,
(As I am yours!) by my strong right of grief.
Not death together, but together life!
Life — life with safe and honorable years,
And power to do with these that which we would!
— His lips comprest — his eye dilates — he is saved!
O, when strong natures into frailer ones
Have struck deep root, if one exalt not both,
Both must drag down and perish!

ÆGISTHUS.

If we should live —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And we shall live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Yet . . . yet —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! shrinking still?
I 'll do the deed. Do not stand off from me.

ÆGISTHUS.

Terrible Spirit!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, not terrible,
Not to thee terrible — O say not so!
To thee I never have been anything
But a weak, passionate, unhappy woman,
(O woe is me!) and now you fear me —

ÆGISTHUS.

No,
But rather worship.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my heart, my heart,
It sends up all its anguish in this cry —
Love me a little!

ÆGISTHUS.

What a spell she has
To sway the inmost courses of the soul!
My spirit is held up to such a height
I dare not breathe. How finely sits this sorrow
Upon her, like the garment of a God!
I cannot fathom her. Does the same birth
Bring forth the monster and the demi-god?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will not doubt! All 's lost, if love be lost, —
Peace, honor, innocence, — gone, gone! all gone!
And you, too — you, poor baffled crownless schemer,
Whose life my love makes royal, clothes in purple,
Establishes in state, without me, answer me,
What should you do but perish, as is fit?
O love, you dare not cease to love me now!
We have let the world go by us. We have trusted
To ourselves only: if we fail ourselves
What shall avail us now? Without my love
What rests for you but universal hate,
And Agamemnon's sword? Ah, no — you love me,
Must love me, better than you ever loved, —
Love me, I think, as you love life itself!
Ægisthus! Speak, Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

O great heart,
I am all yours. Do with me what you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, if you love me, I have strength for both.
And you do love me still?

ÆGISTHUS.

O more, thrice more,
Thrice more than wert thou Aphroditë's self
Stept zoned and sandalled from the Olympian Feast
Or first revealed among the pink sea-foam.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Whate'er I am, be sure that I am that
Which thou hast made me, — nothing of myself.
Once, all unheedful, careless of myself,
And wholly ignorant of what I was,
I grew up as a reed some wind will touch,
And wake to prophecy, — till then all mute,
And void of melody, — a foolish weed!
My soul was blind, and all my life was dark,
And all my heart pined with some ignorant want.
I moved about, a shadow in the house,
And felt unwedded though I was a wife;
And all the men and women which I saw
Were but as pictures painted on a wall:
To me they had not either heart, or brain,
Or lips, or language, — pictures! nothing more.
Then, suddenly, athwart those lonely hours
Which, day by day dreamed listlessly away,
Led to the dark and melancholy tomb,
Thy presence passed and touched me with a soul.
My life did but begin when I found thee.
O what a strength was hidden in this heart!
As, all unvalued, in its cold dark cave
Under snow hills, some rare and priceless gem
May sparkle and burn, so in this life of mine
Love lay shut up. You broke the rock away,
You lit upon the jewel that it hid,
You plucked it forth, — to wear it, my Beloved!
To set in the crown of thy dear life!
To embellish fortune! Cast it not away.
Now call me by the old familiar names:
Call me again your Queen, as once you used;
Your large-eyed Herë!

ÆGISTHUS.

O, you are a Queen
That should have none but Gods to rule over!
Make me immortal with one costly kiss!

VIII. CHORUS. ELECTRA. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! I hear the people shout.

ELECTRA.

See how these two do mutually confer,
Hatching new infamy. Now will he dare,
In his unbounded impudence, to meet
My father's eyes? The hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O love, be bold! the hour is nigh at hand.

ELECTRA.

Laden with retribution, lingering slow.

ÆGISTHUS.

A time in travail with some great distress.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, rather safety for the rest of time.
O love! O hate!

ELECTRA.

O vengeance!

ÆGISTHUS.

O wild chance
If favoring fate —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Despair is more than fate.

CHORUS.

Io! Io! The King is on his march.

ÆGISTHUS.

Did you hear that?

ELECTRA.

The hour is nigh at hand!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Leave me to deal with these. I know the arts
That guide the doubtful purpose of discourse
Through many windings to the appointed goal.
I'll draw them on to such a frame of mind
As best befits our purpose. You, meanwhile,
Scatter vague words among the other crowd,
Lest the event, when it is due, fall foul
Of unpropitious natures.

ÆGISTHUS.

Do you fear
The helpless, blind ill-will of such a crowd?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He only fears mankind who knows them not.
But him I praise not who despises them.
Whence come, Electra?

ELECTRA.

From my father's hearth
To meet him; for the hour is nigh at hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

So do our hopes race hotly to one end,
(A noble rivalry!) as who shall first
Embrace this happy fortune. Tarry not.
We too will follow.

ELECTRA.

Justice, O be swift!

IX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. HERALD.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A froward child! She's gone. My blood 's in her.
Her father's, too, looks out of that proud face.
She is too bold . . . ha, well — Ægisthus? . . . gone!
O fate! to be a woman! You great Gods,
Why did you fashion me in this soft mould?
Give me these lengths of silky hair? These hands
Too delicately dimpled! and these arms
Too white, too weak! yet leave the man's heart in me,
To mar your masterpiece, — that I should perish,
Who else had won renown among my peers,

A man, with men, — perchance a god with you,
Had you but better sexed me, you blind Gods!
But, as for man, all things are fitting to him.
He strikes his fellow 'mid the clanging shields,
And leaps among the smoking walls, and takes
Some long-haired virgin wailing at the shrines,
Her brethren having fallen; and you Gods
Commend him, crown him, grant him ample days,
And dying honor, and an endless peace
Among the deep Elysian asphodels.
O fate, to be a woman! To be led
Dumb, like a poor mule, at a master's will,
And be a slave, though bred in palaces,
And be a fool, though seated with the wise, —
A poor and pitiful fool, as I am now,
Loving and hating my vain life away!

CHORUS.

These flowers — we plucked them
At morning, and took them
From bright bees that sucked them
And warm winds that shook them
'Neath blue hills that o'erlook them.

SEMI-CHORUS.

With the dews of the meadow
Our rosy warm fingers
Sparkle yet, and the shadow
Of the summer-cloud lingers
In the hair of us singers.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Ere these buds on our altars
Fade; ere the forkt fire,
Fed with pure honey, falters
And fails: louder, higher
Raise the Pæan.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Draw nigher,
Stand closer! First praise we
The Father of all.
To him the song raise we.
Over Heaven's golden wall
Let it fall! Let it fall!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then Apollo, the king of
The lyre and the bow;
Who taught us to sing of
The deeds that we know, —
Deeds well done long ago.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Next, of all the Immortals,
Athenë's gray eyes;
Who sits throned in our portals,
Ever fair, ever wise.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Neither dare we despise
To extol the great Herë.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

And then,
As is due, shall our song
Be of those among men
Who were brave, who were strong,
Who endured.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the wrong
Of the Phrygian: and Ilion's false sons:
And Scamander's wild wave
Through the bleak plain that runs.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

Then, the death of the brave.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

Last, of whom the Gods save
For new honors: of them none
So good or so great
As our chief Agamemnon
The crown of our State.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, true hearts, rejoice with me! This day
Shall crown the hope of ten uncertain years!

CHORUS.

For Agamemnon cannot be far off —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He comes — and yet — O Heaven preserve us all!
My heart is weak — there's One he brings not back;

Who went with him; who will not come again;
Whom we shall never see! —

CHORUS.

O Queen, for whom,
Lamenting thus, is your great heart cast down?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The earliest loved—the early lost! my child—

CHORUS.

Iphigenia?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

She — my child —

CHORUS.

— Alas!
That was a terrible necessity!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Was it necessity? O pardon, friends,
But in the dark, unsolaced solitude,
Wild thoughts come to me, and perplex my heart.
This, which you call a dread necessity,
Was it a murder or a sacrifice?

CHORUS.

It was a God that did decree the death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'T is through the heart the Gods do speak to us.
High instincts are the oracles of heaven.
Did ever heart, — did ever God, before,
Suggest such foul infanticidal lie?

CHORUS.

Be comforted! The universal good
Needed this single, individual loss.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Can all men's good be helped by one man's crime?

CHORUS.

He loosed the Greeks from Aulis by that deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O casual argument! Who gave the Greeks
Such bloody claim upon a virgin's life?
Shall the pure bleed to purge impurity?
A hundred Helens were not worth that death!
What! had the manhood of combinéd Greece,
Whose boast was in its untamed strength, no help
Better than the spilt blood of one poor girl?
Or, if it were of need that blood should flow,
What God ordained him executioner?
Was it for him the armament was planned?
For him that angry Greece was leagued in war?
For him, or Menelaus, was this done?
Was the cause his, or Menelaus' cause?
Was he less sire than Menelaus was?
He, too, had children; did he murder them?
O, was it manlike? was it human, even?

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! it was an evil thing.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O friends, if any one among you all,
If any be a mother, bear with me!
She was my earliest born, my best beloved.
The painful labor of that perilous birth
That gave her life did almost take my own.
He had no pain. He did not bring her forth.
How should he, therefore, love her as I loved?

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alas! Our tears run down with yours.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O, who shall say with what delicious tears,
With what ineffable tenderness, while he
Took his blithe pastime on the windy plain,
Among the ringing camps, and neighing steeds,
First of his glad compeers, I sat apart,
Silent, within the solitary house:
Rocking the little child upon my breast;
And soothed its soft eyes into sleep with song!

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! unhappy, sad, unchilded one!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, when I taught, from inarticulate sounds,
The little, lisping lips, to breathe his name.
Now they will never breathe that name again!

CHORUS.

Alas! for Hades has not any hope,
Since Thracian women lopped the tuneful head
Of Orpheus, and Heracleus is no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Or, spread in prayer, the helpless, infant hands,
That they, too, might invoke the Gods for him.
Alas, who now invokes the Gods for her?
Unwedded, hapless, gone to glut the womb
Of dark, untimely Orcus!

CHORUS.

Ai! alas!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I would have died, if that could be, for her!
When life is half-way set to feeble eld,
And memory more than hope, and to dim eyes
The gorgeous tapestry of existence shows
Mothed, fingered, frayed, and bare, 't were not so hard
To fling away this ravelled skein of life,
Which else, a little later, Fate had cut.
And who would sorrow for the o'erblown rose
Sharp winter strews about its own bleak thorns?
But, cropped before the time, to fall so young!
And wither in the gloomy crown of Dis!
Never to look upon the blessed sun —

CHORUS.

Ai! ai! alinon! woe is me, this grief
Strikes pity paralyzed. All words are weak!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

And I had dreamed such splendid dreams for her!
Who would not so for Agamemnon's child?
For we had hoped that she, too, in her time
Would be the mother of heroic men!

CHORUS.

There rises in my heart an awful fear,
Lest from these evils darker evils come;
For heaven exacts, for wrong, the uttermost tear,
And death hath language after life is dumb!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It works! it works!

CHORUS.

Look, some one comes this way.

HERALD.

O Honor of the House of Tantalus!
The king's wheels echo in the brazen gates.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Our heart is half-way there, to welcome him.
How looks he? Well? And all our long-lost friends —
Their faces grow before me! Lead the way
Where we may meet them. All our haste seems slow.

CHORUS.

Would that he brought his dead child back with him!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Now let him come. The mischief works apace!

X. CHORUS.

CHORUS.

The winds were lulled in Aulis; and the day,
Down-sloped, was loitering to the lazy west.
There was no motion of the glassy bay,

But all things by a heavy light opprest.
Windless, cut off from the destined way, —
Dark shrouds, distinct against the lurid lull, —
Dark ropes hung useless, loose, from mast to hull, —
The black ships lay abreast.
Not any cloud would cross the brooding skies.
The distant sea boomed faintly. Nothing more.
They walked about upon the yellow shore ;
Or, lying listless, huddled groups supine,
With faces turned toward the flat sea-spine,
They planned the Phrygian battle o'er and o'er ;
Till each grew sullen, and would talk no more,
But sat, dumb-dreaming. Then would some one rise,
And look toward the hollow hulls, with haggard, hopeless eyes —
Wild eyes — and, crowding round, yet wilder eyes —
And gaping, languid lips ;
And everywhere that men could see,
About the black, black ships,
Was nothing but the deep-red sea ;
The deep-red shore ;
The deep-red skies ;
The deep-red silence, thick with thirsty sighs ;
And daylight, dying slowly. Nothing more.
The tall masts stood upright ;
And not a sail above the burnished prores ;
The languid sea, like one outwearied quite,
Shrank, dying inward into hollow shores,
And breathless harbors, under sandy bars ;
And, one by one, down tracts of quivering blue,
The singed and sultry stars
Looked from the inmost heaven, far, faint, and few,
While, all below, the sick and steaming brine
The spilled-out sunset did incarnadine.

At last one broke the silence ; and a word
Was lisped and buzzed about, from mouth to mouth ;
Pale faces grew more pale ; wild whispers stirred ;
And men, with moody, murmuring lips, conferred
In ominous tones, from shaggy beards uncouth :
As though some wind had broken from the blurred
And blazing prison of the stagnant drouth,
And stirred the salt sea in the stifled south.
The long-robed priests stood round ; and, in the gloom,
Under black brows, their bright and greedy eyes
Shone deathfully ; there was a sound of sighs,
Thick-sobbed from choking throats among the crowd,
That, whispering, gathered close, with dark heads bowed ;
But no man lifted up his voice aloud,
For heavy hung o'er all the helpless sense of doom.

Then, after solemn prayer,
The father bade the attendants, tenderly
Lift her upon the lurid altar-stone.
There was no hope in any face ; each eye
Swam tearful, that her own did gaze upon.
They bound her helpless hands with mournful care ;
And looped up her long hair,
That hung about her, like an amber shower,
Mixed with the saffron robe, and falling lower,
Down from her bare and cold white shoulder flung.
Upon the heaving breast the pale cheek hung,
Suffused with that wild light that rolled among
The pausing crowd, out of the crimson drouth.
They held hot hands upon her pleading mouth ;
And stifled on faint lips the natural cry.
Back from the altar-stone,
Slow-moving in his fixéd place
A little space,
The speechless father turned. No word was said.
He wrapped his mantle close about his face,

In his dumb grief, without a moan.
The lopping axe was lifted overhead.
Then, suddenly,
There sounded a strange motion of the sea,
Booming far inland; and above the east
A ragged cloud rose slowly, and increased.
Not one line in the horoscope of Time
Is perfect. O, what falling off is this,
When some grand soul, that else had been sublime,
Falls unawares amiss,
And stoops its crested strength to sudden crime!

So gracious a thing is it, and sweet,
In life's clear centre one true man to see,
That holds strong nature in a wise control;
Throbbing out, all round, the heat
Of a large and liberal soul.
No shadow, simulating life,
But pulses warm with human nature,
In a soul of godlike stature;
Heart and brain, all rich and rife
With noble instincts; strong to meet
Time calmly, in his purposed place.
Sound through and through, and all complete;
Exalting what is low and base;
Enlarging what is narrow and small;
He stamps his character on all,
And with his grand identity
Fills up Creation's eye.
He will not dream the aimless years away
In blank delay,
But makes eternity of to-day,
And reaps the full-eared time. For him
Nature her affluent horn doth brim,
To strew with fruit and flowers his way—
Fruits ripe and flowers gay.

The clear soul in his earnest eyes
Looks through and through all plaited lies,
Time shall not rob him of his youth,
Nor narrow his large sympathies.
He is not true, he is a truth,
And such a truth as never dies.
Who knows his nature, feels his right,
And, toiling, toils for his delight;
Not as slaves toil: where'er he goes,
The desert blossoms with the rose.
He trusts himself in scorn of doubt,
And lets orbed purpose widen out.
The world works with him; all men see
Some part of them fulfilled in him;
His memory never shall grow dim;
He holds the heaven and earth in fee,
Not following that, fulfilling this,
He is immortal, for he is!

O weep! weep! weep!
Weep for the young that die;
As it were pale flowers that wither under
The smiting sun, and fall asunder,
Before the dews on the grass are dry,
Or the tender twilight is out of the sky,
Or the lilies have fallen asleep;
Or ships by a wanton wind cut short
Are wrecked in sight of the placid port
Sinking strangely, and suddenly—
Sadly, and strangely, and suddenly—
Into the black Plutonian deep.
O weep! weep! weep!
Weep, and bow the head,
For those whose sun is set at noon;
Whose night is dark, without a moon;
Whose aim of life is sped
Beyond pursuing woes,
And the arrow of angry foes,
To the darkness that no man knows—
The darkness among the dead.
Let us mourn, and bow the head,
And lift up the voice, and weep
For the early dead!
For the early dead we may bow the head,
And strike the breast, and weep;
But, O, what shall be said
For the living sorrow?
For the living sorrow our grief—
Dumb grief—draws no relief
From tears, nor yet may borrow
Solace from sound or speech;—
For the living sorrow
That heaps to-morrow upon to-morrow
In piled-up pain, beyond Hope's reach!
It is well that we mourn for the early dead,
Strike the breast, and bow the head;
For the sorrow for these may be sung, or said,
And the chaplets be woven for the fallen head,
And the urns to the stately tombs be led,
And Love from their memory may be fed,
And song may ennoble the anguish;
But, O, for the living sorrow,—
For the living sorrow what hopes remain?
For the prisoned, pining, passionate pain,
That is doomed forever to languish,

And to languish forever in vain,
For the want of the words that may be-
stead
The hunger that out of loss is bred.
O friends, for the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow —
For the living sorrow what shall be said?

XI. A PHOCIAN. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS.

PHOCIAN.

O noble strangers, if indeed you be
Such as you seem, of Argos, and the land
That the unconquer'd Agamemnon rules,
Tell me is this the palace, these the roofs
Of the Atridæ, famed in ancient song?

CHORUS.

Not without truth you name the neigh-
borhood,
Standing before the threshold, and the
doors
Of Pelops, and upon the Argive soil.
That which you see above the Agora
Is the old fane of the Lycæan God,
And this the house of Agamemnon's
queen.
But whence art thou? For if thy dusty
locks,
And those soiled sandals show with
aught of truth,
Thou shouldst be come from far.

PHOCIAN.

And am so, friends,
But, by Heaven's favor, here my jour-
ney ends.

CHORUS.

Whence, then, thy way?

PHOCIAN.

From Phocis; charged with gifts
For Agamemnon, and with messages
From Strophius, and the sister of your
king.
Our watchmen saw the beacon on the
hills,
And leaped for joy. Say, is the king
yet come?

CHORUS.

He comes this way; stand by, I hear
them shout;
Here shall you meet him, as he mounts
the hill.

PHOCIAN.

Now blest be all the Gods, from Father
Zeus,
Who reigns o'er windy Œta, far away,
To King Apollo, with the golden horns.

CHORUS.

Look how they cling about him! Far
and near
The town breaks loose, and follows after,
Crowding up the ringing ways.
The boy forgets to watch the steer;
The grazing steer forgets to graze;
The shepherd leaves the herd;
The priest will leave the fane;
The deep heart of the land is stirred
To sunny tears, and tearful laughter,
To look into his face again.

Burst, burst the brazen gates!
Throw open the hearths, and follow!
Let the shouts of the youths go up to
Apollo,
Lord of the graceful quiver:
Till the tingling sky dilates —
Dilates, and palpitates;
And, Pæan! Pæan! the virgins sing;
Pæan! Pæan! the king! the king!
Laden with spoils from Phrygia!
Io! Io! Io! they sing
Till the pillars of Olympus ring:
Io! to Queen Ortygia,
Whose double torch shall burn forever!
But thou, O Lord of the graceful quiver,
Bid, bid thy Pythian splendor halt,
Where'er he beams, surpassing sight;
Or on some ocean isthmus bent,
Or wheeled from the dark continent,
Half-way down Heaven's rosy vault,
Toward the dewy cone of night.
Let not the breathless air grow dim,
Until the whole land look at him!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand back!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Will he come this way?

SEMI-CHORUS.

No; by us.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Gods, what a crowd!

SEMI-CHORUS.
How firm the old men walk!

SEMI-CHORUS.
There goes the king. I know him by his beard.

SEMI-CHORUS.
And I, too, by the manner of his gait.
That Godlike spirit lifts him from the earth.

SEMI-CHORUS.
How gray he looks!

SEMI-CHORUS.
His cheek is seamed with scars.

SEMI-CHORUS.
What a bull's front!

SEMI-CHORUS.
He stands up like a tower.

SEMI-CHORUS.
Ay, like some moving tower of arméd men,
That carries conquest under city-walls.

SEMI-CHORUS.
He lifts his sublime head, and in his port
Bears eminent authority.

SEMI-CHORUS.
Behold,
His spear shows like the spindle of a Fate!

SEMI-CHORUS.
O, what an arm!

SEMI-CHORUS.
Most fit for such a sword;
Look at that sword.

SEMI-CHORUS.
What shoulders!

SEMI-CHORUS.
What a throat!

SEMI-CHORUS.
What are these bearing?

SEMI-CHORUS.
Urns.

SEMI-CHORUS.
Alas! alas!

SEMI-CHORUS.
O friends, look here! how are the mighty men
Shrunk up into a little vase of earth,
A child might lift. Sheathed each in brazen plates,
They went so heavy, they come back so light,
Sheathed, each one, in the brazen urn of death!

SEMI-CHORUS.
With what a stateliness he moves along!

SEMI-CHORUS.
See, how they touch his skirt, and grasp his hand!

SEMI-CHORUS.
Is that the queen?

SEMI-CHORUS.
Ay, how she matches him!
With what grand eyes she looks up, full in his!

SEMI-CHORUS.
Say, what are these?

SEMI-CHORUS.
O Phrygians! how they walk!
The only sad men in the crowd, I think.

SEMI-CHORUS.
But who is this, that with such scornful brows,
And looks averted, walks among the rest?

SEMI-CHORUS.
I know not, but some Phrygian woman, sure.

SEMI-CHORUS.
Her heavy-fallen hair down her white neck
(A dying sunbeam tangled in each tress)
All its neglected beauty pours one way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Her looks bend ever on the alien ground,
As though the stones of Troy were in her path.
And in the painéd paleness of her brow
Sorrow hath made a regal tenement.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Here comes Electra ; young Orestes, too ;
See how he emulates his father's stride !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Ægisthus, where he walks apart,
And bites his lip.

SEMI-CHORUS.

I oft have seen him so
When something chafes him in his bitter moods.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace, here they come !

CHORUS.

Io ! Io ! The King !

XII. AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, ÆGISTHUS, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CASSANDRA, *a Phocian, Chorus, Semi-Chorus, and others in the procession.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O blazing sun, that in thy skyey tower
Pausest to see one kingly as thyself,
Lend all thy brightest beams to light his head,
And gild our gladness ! Friends, behold the King !
Now hath Ætolian Jove, the arbiter
Of conquests, well disposed the issues here ;
For every night that brought not news from Troy
Heaped fear on fear, as waves succeed to waves,
When Northern blasts blow white the Cretan main, —
Knowing that thou, far off, from toil to toil
Climbedst, uncertain. Unto such an one
His children, and young offspring of the house
Are as a field, which he, the husbandman,
Owning far off, does only look upon
At seedtime once, nor then till harvest comes ;
And his sad wife must wet with nightly tears
Unsolaced pillows, fearing for his fate.
To these how welcome, then, his glad return,
When he, as thou, comes heavy with the weight
Of great achievements, and the spoils of time.

AGAMEMNON.

Enough ! enough ! we weigh you at full worth,
And hold you dear, whose gladness equals yours ;
But women ever err by over-talk.
Silence to women, as the beard to men,
Brings honor ; and plain truth is hurt, not helped
By many words. To each his separate sphere
The Gods allot. To me the sounding camp,
Steeds, and the oaken spear ; to you the hearth,
Children, and household duties of the loom.
'T is man's to win an honorable name ;
Woman's to keep it honorable still.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

(O beast ! O weakness of this womanhood !
To let these pompous male things strut in our eyes,
And in their lordship lap themselves secure,
Because the lots in life are fallen to them.
Am I less heart and head, less blood and brain,
Less force and feeling, pulse and passion — I —
Than this self-worshipper — a lie all through ?)
Forgive if joy too long unloose our lips,
Silent so long : your words fall on my soul
As rain on thirsty lands, that feeds the dearth
With blesséd nourishment. My whole heart hears.
You speaking thus, I would be silent ever.

AGAMEMNON.

Who is this man?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A Phocian, by his look.

PHOCIAN.

O King, from Strophius, and your sister's court,
Despatched with this sealed tablet, and with gifts,
Though both express, so says my royal Head,
But poorly the rich welcome they intend.
Will you see this? — and these?

AGAMEMNON.

Anon! anon!
We'll look at them within. O child, thine eyes
Look warmer welcome than all words express.
Thou art mine own child by that royal brow.
Nature hath marked thee mine.

ELECTRA.

O Father!

AGAMEMNON.

Come!
And our Orestes! He is nobly grown;
He shall do great deeds when our own are dim.
So shall men come to say "the father's sword
In the son's hands hath hewn out nobler fame."
Think of it, little one! where is our cousin?

ÆGISTHUS.

Here! And the keys of the Acropolis?

AGAMEMNON.

O well! this dust and heat are overmuch.
And, cousin, you look pale. Anon! anon!
Speak to us by and by. Let business wait.
Is our house ordered? we will take the bath.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Will you within? where all is ordered fair
Befitting state: cool chambers, marble-floored
Or piled with blazing carpets, scented rare
With the sweet spirit of each odorous gum
In dim, delicious, amorous mists about
The purple-paven, silver-sided bath,
Deep, flashing, pure.

AGAMEMNON.

Look to our captives then.
I charge you chiefly with this woman here,
Cassandra, the mad prophetess of Troy.
See that you chafe her not in her wild moods.

XIII. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Linger not!

ÆGISTHUS.

What? you will to-day —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— This hour.

ÆGISTHUS.

O, if some chance mar all!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We'll make chance sure.
Doubt is the doomsman of self-judged disgrace:
But every chance brings safety to self-help.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ay, but the means — the time —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— Fulfil themselves.
O most irresolute heart! is this a time
When through the awful pause of life, distinct,
The sounding shears of Fate slope near, to stand
Meek, like tame wethers, and be shorn? How say you,
The blithe wind up, and the broad sea before him,
Who would crouch all day long beside the mast
Counting the surges beat his idle helm,
Because between him and the golden isles

The shadow of a passing storm might hang?
Danger, being pregnant, doth beget resolve.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou wert not born to fail. Give me thy hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Take it.

ÆGISTHUS.

It does not tremble.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O be strong!
The future hangs upon the die we cast:
Fortune plays high for us—

ÆGISTHUS.

Gods grant she win.

XIV. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CASSANDRA.

CHORUS.

O thou that dost with globéd glory
Sweep the dark world at noon of night,
Or among snowy summits, wild and hoary,
Or through the mighty silences
Of immemorial seas,
With all the stars behind thee flying white,
O take with thee, where'er
Thou wanderest, ancient Care,
And hide her in some interlunar haunt;
Where but the wild bird's chaunt
At night, through rocky ridges gaunt,
Or moanings of some homeless sea may find her
There, Goddess, bar, and bind her;
Where she may pine, but wander not;
Loathe her haunts, but leave them not;
Wail and rave to the wind and wave
That hear, yet understand her not;
And curse her chains, yet cleave them not;
And hate her lot, yet help it not.
Or let her rove with Gods undone
Who dwell below the setting sun,
And the sad western hours
That burn in fiery bowers;
Or in Amphitrité's grot
Where the vexéd tides unite,
And the spent wind, howling, breaks
O'er sullen oceans out of sight
Among sea-snakes, that the white moon wakes
Till they shake themselves into diamond flakes,
Coil and twine in the glittering brine
And swing themselves in the long moonshine;
Or by wild shores hoarsely rage,
And moan, and vent her spite,
In some inhospitable harborage
Of Thracian waters, white.
There let her grieve, and grieve, and hold her breath
Until she hate herself to death.
I seem with rapture lifted higher,
Like one in mystic trance.
O Pan! Pan! Pan!
First friend of man,
And founder of Heaven's choir,
Come thou from old Cyllenë, and inspire
The Gnossian, and Nysæan dance!
Come thou, too, Delian king,
From the blue Ægean sea,
And Mycone's yellow coast:
Give my spirit such a wing
As there the foolish Icarus lost,
That she may soar above the cope
Of this high pinnacle of gladness,
And dizzy height of hope;
And there, beyond all reach of sadness,
May tune my lips to sing
Great Pæans, full and free,
Till the whole world ring
With such heart-melting madness
As bards are taught by thee!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to the sad Cassandra, how she stands!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She turns not from the wringing of her hands.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What is she doing?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, her lips are moved.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And yet their motion shapes not any sound.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Speak to her.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She will heed not.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But yet speak.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, cease a little while
From mourning. Recognize the work of Heaven.
Troy smoulders. Think not of it. Let the past
Be buried in the past. Tears mend it not.
Fate may be kindlier, yet, than she appears.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She does not answer.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Call to her again.

SEMI-CHORUS.

O break this scornful silence! Hear us speak.
We would console you.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look, how she is moved!

SEMI-CHORUS.

O speak! the heart's hurt oft is helped by words.

CASSANDRA.

O Itys! Itys! Itys!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What a shriek!
She takes the language of the nightingale,
Unhappy bird! that mourns her perished form,
And leans her breast against a thorn, all night.

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the shambles.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Listen, friends!
She mutters something to herself.

CASSANDRA.

Alas!
Did any name Apollo? woe is me!

SEMI-CHORUS.

She calls upon the God.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Unhappy one,
What sorrow strikes thee with bewilderment?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now she is mute again.

CHORUS.

A Stygian cold
Creeps through my limbs, and loosens every joint.
The hot blood freezes in its arteries,
And stagnates round the region of the heart.
A cloud comes up from sooty Acheron,
And clothes mine eyelids
With infernal night.
My hair stands up.
What supernatural awe
Shoots, shrivelling through me,
To the marrow and bone?
O dread and wise Prophetic Powers,
Whose strong-compelling law
Doth hold in awe
The laboring hours,
Your intervention I invoke,
My soul from this wild doubt to save;
Whether you have
Your dwelling in some dark, oracular cave,
Or solemn, sacred oak;
Or in Dodona's ancient, honored beech,
Whose mystic boughs above
Sat the wise dove;
Or if the tuneful voice of old
Awake in Delos, to unfold
Dark wisdom in ambiguous speech.
Upon the verge of strange despair
My heart grows dizzy. Now I seem
Like one that dreams some ghastly dream,
And cannot cast away his care,
But harrows all the haggard air
With his hard breath. Above, beneath,
The empty silence seems to teem
With apprehension. O declare
What hidden thing doth Fate prepare,
What hidden, horrible thing doth Fate prepare?
For of some hidden grief my heart seems half aware.

XV. CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA. CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

One blow makes all sure. Ay, but then,
— beyond?
I cannot trammel up the future thus,
And so forecast the time, as with one blow
To break the hundred Hydra-heads of Chance.
Beyond — beyond I dare not look, for who,
If first he scanned the space, would leap the gulf?
One blow secures the moment. O, but he . . .
Ay, there it lies! I dread lest my love, being
So much the stronger, scare his own to death;
As what they comprehend not, men abhor.
He has a wavering nature, easily
Unpoised; and trembling ever on extremes.
O, what if terror outweigh love, and love,
Having defiled his countenance, take part
Against himself, self-loathed, a fallen God?
Ah, his was never yet the loving soul,
But rather that which lets itself be loved;
As some loose lily leans upon a lake,
Letting the lymph reflect it, as it will,
Still idly swayed, whichever way the stream
Stirs the green tangles of the water moss.
The flower of his love never bloomed upright,
But a sweet parasite, that loved to lean
On stronger natures, winning strength from them, —
Not such a flower as whose delirious cup
Maddens the bee, and never can give forth
Enough of fragrance, yet is ever sweet.
Yet which is sweetest, — to receive or give?
Sweet to receive, and sweet to give, in love!
When one is never sated that receives,
Nor ever all exhausted one that gives.
I think I love him more, that I resemble
So little aught that pleases me in him.
Perchance, if I dared question this dark heart,
'T is not for him, but for myself in him,
For that which is my softer self in him, —
I have done this, and this, — and shall do more:
Hoped, wept, dared wildly, and will overcome!
Does he not need me? It is sweet to think
That I am all to him, whate'er I be
To others; and to one, — little, I know!
But to him, all things, — sceptre, sword, and crown.
For who would live, but to be loved by some one?
Be fair, but to give beauty to another?
Or wise, but to instruct some sweet desire?
Or strong, but that thereby love may rejoice?
Or who for crime's sake would be criminal?
And yet for love's sake would not dare wild deeds?
A mutual necessity, one fear,
One hope, and the strange posture of the time
Unite us now; — but this need overpast,
O, if, 'twixt his embrace and mine, there rise
The reflex of a murdered head! and he,
Remembering the crime, remember not
It was for him that I am criminal,
But rather hate me for the part he took —
Against his soul, as he will say — in this? —
I will not think it. Upon this wild venture,
Freighted with love's last wealthiest merchandise,
My heart sets forth. To-morrow I shall wake
A beggar, as it may be, or thrice rich.
As one who plucks his last gem from his crown
(Some pearl for which, in youth, he bartered states)
And, sacrificing with an anxious heart,
Toward night puts seaward in a little bark
For lands reported far beyond the sun,
Trusting to win back kingdoms, or there drown —
So I — and with like perilous endeavor!

O, but I think I could implore the Gods
More fervently than ever, in my youth,
I prayed that help of Heaven I needed not,
And lifted innocent hands to their great sky.
So much to lose . . . so much to gain . . . so much . . .
I dare not think how . . .
Ha, the Phrygian slave!
He dares to bring his mistress to the hearth!
She looks unhappy. I will speak to her.
Perchance her hatred may approve my own,
And help me in the work I am about.
'T were well to sound her.
Be not so cast down,
Unhappy stranger! Fear no jealous hand.
In sorrow I, too, am not all untried.
Our fortunes are not so dissimilar,
Slaves both — and of one master.
Nay, approach.
Is my voice harsh in its appeal to thee?
If so, believe me, it belies my heart.
A woman speaks to thee.
What, silent still?
O, look not on me with such sullen eyes,
There is no accusation in my own.
Rather on him that brought thee, than on thee,
Our scorn is settled. I would help thee. Come!
Mute still?
I know that shame is ever dumb,
And ever weak; but here is no reproach.
Listen! Thy fate is given to thy hands.
Art thou a woman, and dost scorn contempt?
Art thou a captive, and dost loathe these bonds?
Art thou courageous, as men call thy race?
Or, helpless art thou, and wouldst overcome?
If so, — look up! For there is hope for thee.
Give me thy hand —

CASSANDRA.

Pah! there is blood on it!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What is she raving of?

CASSANDRA.

The place, from old,
Is evil.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, there is a sickness, here,
That needs the knife.

CASSANDRA.

O, horrible! blood! blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I see you are a Phrygian to the bone!
Coward and slave! be so forevermore!

CASSANDRA.

Apollo! O Apollo! O blood! blood!
The whole place swims with it! The slippery steps
Steam with the fumes! The rank air smells of blood!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Heed her not! for she knows not what she says.
This is some falling sickness of the soul.
Her fever frights itself.

CASSANDRA.

It reeks! it reeks!
It smokes! it stifles! blood! blood, everywhere!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

See, he hath brought this mad woman from Troy,
To shame our honor, and insult our care.
Look to her, friends, my hands have other work!

CHORUS.

Alas, the House of Tantalus is doomed!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

The King sleeps — like an infant. His huge strength
Holds slumber thrice as close as other men.
How well he sleeps! Make garlands for the Gods.
I go to watch the couch. Cull every flower,
And honor all the tutelary fanes
With sacrifice as ample as our joy,
Lest some one say we reverence not the Gods!

CHORUS.

O dooméd House and race!
O toilsome, toilsome horsemanship
Of Pelops; that ill omen brought to us!
For since the drownéd Myrtilus
Did from his golden chariot slip
To his last sleep, below the deep,
Nothing of sad calamitous disgrace
Hath angry Heaven ceased to heap
On this unhappy House of Tantalus.
Not only upon sacred leaves of old,
Preserved in many a guarded, mystic fold,
But sometimes, too, enrolled
On tablets fair
Of stone or brass, with quaint and curious care,
In characters of gold,
And many an iron-bound, melancholy book,
The wisdom of the wise is writ;
And hardly shall a man,
For all he can,
By painful, slow degrees,
And nightly reveries,
Of long, laborious thought, grow learned in these.
But who, that reads a woman's wily look,
Shall say what evil hides, and lurks in it?
Or fathom her false wit?
For by a woman fell the man
Who did Nemæa's pest destroy,
And the brinded Hydra slew,
And many other wonders wrought.
By a woman, fated Troy
Was overset, and fell to naught.
Royal Amphiaraus, too,
All his wisdom could not free
From his false Eriphyle,
Whom a golden necklace bought, —
So has it been, and so shall be,
Ever since the world began!

O woman, woman, of what other earth
Hath dædal Nature moulded thee?
Thou art not of our clay compact,
Not of our common clay; —
But when the painful world in labor lay —
Labor long — and agony,
In her heaving throes distract,
And vext with angry Heaven's red ire,
Nature, kneading snow and fire,
In thy mystic being pent
Each contrary element.
Life and death within thee blent:
All despair and all desire:
There to mingle and ferment.
While, mad midwives, at thy birth,
Furies mixt with Sirens bent,
Inter-wreathing snakes and smiles, —
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles.

Such a splendid mischief thou!
With thy light of languid eyes;
And thy bosom of pure snow:
And thine heart of fire below,
Whose red light doth come and go
Ever o'er thy changeful cheek
When love-whispers tremble weak:
Thy warm lips and pensive sighs,
That the breathless spirit bow:
And the heavenward life that lies
In the still serenities
Of thy snowy, airy brow, —
Thine ethereal airy brow.
Such a splendid mischief, thou!
What are all thy witcheries?
All thine evil beauty? All
Thy soft looks, and subtle smiles?
Tangled tresses? Mad caresses?
Tendernesses? Tears and kisses?
And the long look, between whiles,
That the helpless heart beguiles,
Tranced in such a subtle thrall?
What are all thy sighs and smiles?
Fairest dreams and falsest guiles!
Hoofs to horses, teeth to lions,
Horns to bulls, and speed to hares,
To the fish to glide through waters,
To the bird to glide through airs,
Nature gave: to men gave courage,
And the use of brazen spears.
What was left to give to woman,
All her gifts thus given? Ah, tears,
Smiles, and kisses, whispers, glances,
Only these; and merely beauty
On her archéd brows unfurled.
And with these she shatters lances,
All unarmed binds arméd Duty,
And in triumph drags the world!

XVI. SEMI-CHORUS. CHORUS. CASSANDRA. AGAMEMNON. CLYTEMNESTRA. ÆGISTHUS.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Break off, break off! It seems I heard a cry.

CHORUS.

Surely one called within the house.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Stand by.

CHORUS.

The Prophetess is troubled. Look, her eye
Rolls fearfully.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Now all is husht once more.

CHORUS.

I hear the feet of some one at the door.

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

Murderess! oh, oh!

SEMI-CHORUS.

The house is filled with shrieks.

CHORUS.

The sound deceives or that was the King's voice.

SEMI-CHORUS.

The voice of Agamemnon!

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

Ai! ai! ai!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is in the toils.

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

I will not die!

ÆGISTHUS (*within*).

O Zeus! he will escape.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

He has it.

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

Ai! ai!

CHORUS.

Some hideous deed is being done within.
Burst in the doors!

SEMI-CHORUS.

I cannot open them.
Barred, barred within!

CASSANDRA.

The axe is at the bull.

CHORUS.

Call the elders.

SEMI-CHORUS.

And the People. O Argives! Argives!
Alinon! Alinon!

CHORUS.

You to the Agora.

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples we.

CHORUS.

Hearken, O maidens!

SEMI-CHORUS.

This way.

CHORUS.

That way.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Quick! quick!

CASSANDRA.

Seal my sight, O Apollo! O Apollo!

CHORUS.

To the Agora!

SEMI-CHORUS.

To the temples!

CHORUS.

Haste! haste!

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

Stabbed, oh!

CHORUS.

Too late!

CASSANDRA.

The bull is bellowing.

ÆGISTHUS (*within*).

Thrust there again.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

One blow has done it all.

ÆGISTHUS (*within*).
Is it quite through?

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).
He will not move again.

SEMI-CHORUS.
O Heaven and Earth! My heart stands still with awe!
Where will this murder end?

CHORUS.
Hold! some one comes!

XVII. ELECTRA. ORESTES. CHORUS. A PHOCIAN.

ELECTRA (*leading* ORESTES).
Save us! save him — Orestes!

CHORUS.
What has fallen?

ELECTRA.
An evil thing. O, we are fatherless!

CHORUS.
Ill-starred Electra! But how fell this chance?

ELECTRA.
Here is no time for words, — scarce time for flight.
When from his royal bath the King would rise, —
That devilish woman, lying long in lurk,
Behind him crept, with stealthy feet unheard,
And flung o'er all his limbs a subtle web.
Caught in the craft of whose contrivéd folds,
Stumbling, he fell. Ægisthus seized a sword;
But halted, half irresolute to strike.
My father, like a lion in the toils,
Upheaved his head, and, writhing, roared with wrath,
And angry shame at this infernal snare.
Almost he rent the blinding nets atwain.
But Clytemnestra on him flung herself,
And caught the steel, and smit him through the ribs.
He slipped, and reeled. She drove the weapon through,
Piercing the heart!

CHORUS.
O woe! what tale is this?

ELECTRA.
I, too, with him, had died, but for this child,
And that high vengeance which is yet to be.

CHORUS.
Alas! then Agamemnon is no more,
Who stood, but now, amongst us, full of life,
Crowned with achieving years! The roof and cope
Of honor, fallen! Where shall we lift our eyes?
Where set renown? Where garner up our hopes?
All worth is dying out. The land is dark,
And Treason looks abroad in the eclipse.
He did not die the death of men that live
Such life as he lived, fall'n among his peers,
Whom the red battle rolled away, while yet
The shout of Gods was ringing through and through them;
But Death that feared to front him in full field,
Lurked by the hearth and smote him from behind.
A mighty man is gone. A mighty grief
Remains. And rumor of undying deeds
For song and legend, to the end of time!
What tower is strong?

ELECTRA.
O friends — if friends you be —
For who shall say where falsehood festers not,
Those being falsest, who should most be true?
Where is that Phocian? Let him take the boy,
And bear him with him to his master's court.
Else will Ægisthus slay him.

CHORUS.
Orphaned one,
Fear you not?

ORESTES.
I am Agamemnon's son.

CHORUS.

Therefore shouldst fear —

ORESTES.

And therefore cannot fear.

PHOCIAN.

I heard a cry. Did any call?

CHORUS.

O, well!
You happen this way in the need of time.

ELECTRA.

O loyal stranger, Agamemnon's child
Is fatherless. This boy appeals to you.
O save him, save him from his father's foes!

PHOCIAN.

Unhappy lady, what wild words are these?

ELECTRA.

The house runs blood. Ægisthus, like a fiend,
Is raging loose, his weapon dripping gore.

CHORUS.

The king is dead.

PHOCIAN.

Is dead!

ELECTRA.

Dead.

PHOCIAN.

Do I dream?

ELECTRA.

Such dreams are dreamed in hell — such dreams — O no!
Is not the earth as solid — heaven above —
The sun in heaven — and Nature at her work —
And men at theirs — the same? O, no! no dream!
We shall not wake — nor he; though the Gods sleep!
Unnaturally murdered —

PHOCIAN.

Murdered!

ELECTRA.

Ay.
And the sun blackens not; the world is green;
The fires of the red west are not put out.
Is not the cricket singing in the grass?
And the shy lizard shooting through the leaves?
I hear the ox low in the labored field.
Those swallows build, and are as garrulous
High up i' the towers. Yet I speak the truth,
By Heaven I speak the truth —

PHOCIAN.

Yet more, vouchsafe
How died the king?

ELECTRA.

O, there shall be a time
For words hereafter. While we dally here,
Fate haunts, and hounds us. Friend, receive this boy.
Bear him to Strophius. All this tragedy
Relate as best you may; it beggars speech.
Tell him a tower of hope is fallen this day —
A name in Greece —

PHOCIAN.

— But you —

ELECTRA.

Away! away!
Destruction posts apace, while we delay.

PHOCIAN.

Come then!

ELECTRA.

I dare not leave my father's hearth,
For who would then do honor to his urn?
It may be that my womanhood and youth
May help me here. It may be I shall fall,
And mix my own with Agamemnon's blood.
No matter. On Orestes hangs the hope
Of all this House. Him save for better days,
And ripened vengeance.

PHOCIAN.

Noble-hearted one!
Come then, last offspring of this fated race.
The future calls thee!

ORESTES.

Sister! Sister!

ELECTRA.

Go!

ORESTES.

O Sister!

ELECTRA.

O my brother!... One last kiss, —
One last long kiss, — how I have loved thee, boy!
Was it for this I nourished thy young years
With stately tales, and legends of the gods?
For this?... How the past crowds upon me! Ah —
Wilt thou recall, in lonely, lonely hours,
How once we sat together on still eves,
(Ah me!) and brooded on all serious themes
Of sweet, and high, and beautiful, and good,
That throng the ancient years. Alcmena's son,
And how his life went out in fire on Œta;
Or of that bright-haired wanderer after fame,
That brought the great gold-fleece across the sea,
And left a name in Colchis; or we spake
Of the wise Theseus, councils, kingdoms, thrones,
And laws in distant lands; or, later still,
Of the great leaguer set round Ilion,
And what heart-stirring tidings of the war
Bards brought to Hellas. But when I would breathe
Thy father's name, didst thou not grasp my hand,
And glorious deeds shone round us like the stars
That lit the dark world from a great way off,
And died up into heaven, among the Gods?

ORESTES.

Sister, O Sister!

ELECTRA.

Ah, too long we linger.
Away! away!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

CHORUS.

Heaven go with thee!
To Crissa points the hand of Destiny.

ELECTRA.

O boy, on thee Fate hangs an awful weight
Of retribution! Let thy father's ghost
Forever whisper in thine ear. Be strong.
About thee, yet unborn, thy mother wove
The mystic web of life in such-like form
That Agamemnon's spirit in thine eyes
Seems living yet. His seal is set on thee;
And Pelops' ivory shoulder marks thee his.
Thee, child, nor contests on the Isthmian plain,
Nor sacred apple, nor green laurel-leaf,
But graver deeds await. Forget not, son,
Whose blood, unwashed, defiles thy mother's doors!

CHORUS.

O haste! I hear a sound within the house.

ELECTRA.

Farewell, then, son of Agamemnon!

PHOCIAN.

Come!

XVIII. ELECTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS.

ELECTRA.

Gone! gone! Ah saved!... O fool, thou missest, here!

CHORUS.

Alas, Electra, whither wilt thou go?

ELECTRA.

Touch me not! Come not near me! Let me be!
For this day, which I hoped for, is not mine.

CHORUS.

See how she gathers round her all her robe,
And sits apart with grief. O, can it be
Great Agamemnon is among the shades?

ELECTRA.

Would I had grasped his skirt, and followed him!

CHORUS.

Alas! there is an eminence of joy,
Where Fate grows dizzy, being mounted there,
And so tilts over on the other side!

O fallen, O fallen
The tower, which stood so high!
Whose base and girth were strong i' the earth,
Whose head was in the sky!
O fall'n that tower of noble power,
That filled up every eye!

He stood so sure, that noble tower!
To make secure, and fill with power,
From length to length, the land of Greece!
In whose strong bulwarks all men saw,
Garnered on the lap of law,
For dearth or danger, spears of war,
And harvest sheaves of peace!
O fall'n, O fall'n that lofty tower,—
The loftiest tower in Greece!

His brows he lift above the noon,
Filled with the day, a noble tower!
Who took the sunshine and the shower,
And flung them back in merry scorn.
Who now shall stand when tempests lower?
He was the first to catch the morn,
The last to see the moon.
O friends, he was a noble tower!
O friends, and fall'n so soon!

Ah, well! lament! lament!
His walls are rent, his bulwarks bent,
And stooped that crested eminence,
Which stood so high for our defence!
For our defence, — to guard, and fence
From all alarm of hurt and harm,
The fulness of a land's content!
O fall'n away, fall'n at midday,
And set before the sun is down,
The highest height of our renown!
O overthrown, the ivory throne!
The spoils of war, the golden crown,
And chiefest honor of the state!
O mourn with me! what tower is free
From over-topping destiny?
What strength is strong to fate?
O mourn with me! when shall we see
Another such, so good, so great?
Another such, to guard the state?

ÆGISTHUS.

He should have stayed to shout through Troy, or bellow
With bulls in Ida —

CHORUS.

Look! Ægisthus comes!
Like some lean tiger, having dipt in blood
His dripping fangs, and hot athirst for more.
His lurid eyeball rolls, as though it swam
Through sanguine films. He staggers, drunk with rage
And crazy mischief.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hold! let no one stir!
I charge you, all of you, who hear me speak,
Where may the boy Orestes lie concealed?
I hold the life of each in gage for his.
If any know where now he hides from us,
Let him beware, not rendering true reply!

CHORUS.

The boy is fled —

ELECTRA.

— is saved!

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra here!
How mean you? What is this?

ELECTRA.

Enough is left
Of Agamemnon's blood to drown you in.

ÆGISTHUS.

You shall not trifle with me, by my beard!
There 's peril in this pastime. Where 's the boy?

ELECTRA.

Half-way to Phocis, Heaven helping him.

ÆGISTHUS.

By the black Styx!

ELECTRA.

Take not the oath of Gods,
Who art but half a man, blaspheming coward!

ÆGISTHUS.

But you, by Heaven, if this be a sword,
Shall not be any more—

ELECTRA.

A slave to thee,
Blundering bloodshedder, though thou boast thyself
As huge as Ossa piled on Pelion,
Or anything but that weak wretch thou art!
O, thou hast only half done thy black work!
Thou shouldst have slain the young lion with the old.
Look that he come not back, and find himself
Ungiven food, and still the lion's share!

ÆGISTHUS.

Insolent! but I know to seal thy lips—

ELECTRA.

—For thou art only strong among the weak.
We know thou hast an aptitude for blood.
To take a woman's is an easy task,
And one well worthy thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

O, but for words!

ELECTRA.

Yet, couldst thou feed on all the noble blood
Of godlike generations on this earth,
It should not help thee to a hero's heart.

CHORUS.

O peace, Electra, but for pity's sake!
Heap not his madness to such dangerous heights.

ELECTRA.

I will speak out my heart's scorn, though I die.

ÆGISTHUS.

And thou shalt die, but not till I have tamed
That stubborn spirit to a wish for life.

CHORUS.

O cease, infatuate! I hear the Queen.

[*By a movement of the Eccyclema the palace is thrown open, and discovers* CLYTEMNESTRA *standing over the body of* AGAMEMNON.

XIX. CLYTEMNESTRA. CHORUS. ÆGISTHUS. ELECTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Argives! behold the man who was your King!

CHORUS.

Dead! dead!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not I, but Fate hath dealt this blow.

CHORUS.

Dead! dead, alas! look where he lies, O friends!
That noble head, and to be brought so low!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He who set light by woman, with blind scorn,
And held her with the beasts we sacrifice,
Lies, by a woman sacrificed himself.
This is high justice which appeals to you.

CHORUS.

Alas! alas! I know not words for this.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We are but as the instrument of heaven.
Our work is not design, but destiny.
A God directs the lightning to its fall;
It smites and slays, and passes otherwhere,
Pure in itself, as when, in light, it left

The bosom of Olympus, to its end.
In this cold heart the wrong of all the past
Lies buried. I avenged, and I forgive.
Honor him yet. He is a king, though fallen.

CHORUS.

O, how she sets Virtue's own crest on Crime,
And stands there stern as Fate's wild arbitress!
Not any deed could make her less than great.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *descends the steps, and lays her hand on the arm of* ÆGISTHUS.)

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Put up the sword! Enough of blood is spilt.

ÆGISTHUS.

Hist! O, not half, — Orestes is escaped.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Sufficient for the future be that thought.
What 's done is well done. What 's undone — yet more:
Something still saved from crime.

ÆGISTHUS.

This lion's whelp
Will work some mischief yet.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

He is a child —
— Our own — we will but war upon the strong.
Not upon infants. Let this matter rest.

ÆGISTHUS.

O, ever, in the wake of thy great will
Let me steer sure! and we will leave behind
Great tracks of light upon the wondering world.
If but you err not here —

CLYTEMNESTRA.

These pale-eyed groups!
See how they huddle shuddering, and stand round;
As when some mighty beast, the brindled lord
Of the rough woodside, sends his wild death-roar
Up the shrill caves, the meaner denizens
Of ancient woods, shy deer, and timorous hares,
Peer from the hairy thickets, and shrink back.
We feared the lion, and we smote him down.
Now fear is over. Shall we turn aside
To harry jackals? Laugh! we have not laughed
So long, I think you have forgotten how!
Have we no right to laugh like other men?
Ha! Ha! I laugh. Now it is time to laugh!

CHORUS.

O, awful sight! Look where the bloody sun,
As though with Agamemnon he were slain,
Runs reeking, lurid, down the palace floors!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

O my beloved! Now will we reign sublime,
And set our foot upon the neck of Fortune!
And, for the rest — O, much remains! — for you,

(*To the* CHORUS.)

A milder sway, if mildly you submit
To our free service and supremacy.
Nor tax, nor toll, to carry dim results
Of distant war beyond the perilous seas.
But gateless justice in our halls of state,
And peace in all the borders of our land!
For you —

(*To* ELECTRA, *who has thrown herself upon the body of* AGAMEMNON.)

ELECTRA.

O, hush! What more remains to me,
But this dead hand, whose clasp is cold in mine?
And all the baffled memory of the past,
Buried with him? What more?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

— A mother's heart,
If you will come to it. Free confidence.
A liberal share in all our future hope.

Now, more than ever — mutually weak —
We stand in need, each of the other's love.
Our love! it shall not sacrifice thee, child,
To wanton whims of war, as he, of old,
Did thy dead sister. If you will not these,
But answer love with scorn, why then —

ELECTRA.

— What then?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Safe silence. And permission to forget.

XX. CHORUS. SEMI-CHORUS. CLYTEMNESTRA. CASSANDRA. ÆGISTHUS.

CHORUS.

What shall we say? What has been done?
Shed no tear! O, shed no tear!
Hang up his harness in the sun;
The hookéd car, and barbéd spear;
And all war's adamantine gear
Of trophied spoils; for all his toils
Are over, alas! are over, and done!
What shall we say? What has been done?
Shed no tear! O, shed no tear!
But keep solemn silence all,
As befits when heroes fall;
Solemn as his fame is; sad
As his end was; earth shall wear
Mourning for him. See, the sun
Blushes red for what is done!
And the wild stars, one by one,
Peer out of the lurid air,
And shrink back with awe and fear,
Shuddering, for what is done.
When the night comes, dark and dun
As our sorrow; blackness far
Shutting out the crimson sun;
Turn his face to the moon and star, —
These are bright as his glories are, —
And great Heaven shall see its son!
What shall we say? What has been done?
Shed no tear! O, shed no tear!
Gather round him, friends! Look here!
All the wreaths which he hath won
In the race that he hath run, —
Laurel garlands, every one!
These are things to think upon,
Mourning till the set of sun, —
Till the mourning moon appear.
Now the wreaths which Fame begun
To uplift, to crown his head,
Memory shall seize upon,
And make chaplets for his bier.
He shall have wreaths though he be dead!
But his monument is here,
Built up in our hearts, and dear
To all honor. Shed no tear!
O, let not any tear be shed!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look at Cassandra! she is stooping down.

SEMI-CHORUS.

She dips and moves her fingers in the blood!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Look to her! There's a wildness in her eye!

SEMI-CHORUS.

What does she?

SEMI-CHORUS.

O, in Agamemnon's blood,
She hath writ *Orestes* on the palace steps!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus!

ÆGISTHUS.

Queen and bride!

CLYTEMNESTRA.

We have not failed.

CHORUS.

Come, venerable, ancient Night!
From sources of the western stars,
In darkest shade that fits this woe.
Consoler of a thousand griefs,
And likest death unalterably calm.
We toil, aspire, and sorrow,
And in a little while shall cease.
For we know not whence we came,
And who can insure the morrow?
Thou, eternally the same,
From of old, in endless peace
Eternally survivest;
Enduring on through good and ill,

Coeval with the Gods ; and still
In thine own silence livest.
Our days thou leadest home
To the great Whither which has no Again !
Impartially to pleasure and to pain
Thou sett'st the bourn. To thee shall all things come.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

But, if he cease to love me, what is gained ?

CASSANDRA.

With wings darkly spreading,
Like ravens to the carcass
Scenting far off the savor of blood,
From shores of the unutterable River.
They gather and swoop,
They waver, they darken.
From the fangs that raven,
From the eyes that glare
Intolerably fierce,
Save me, Apollo !
Ai ! Ai ! Ai !
Alinon ! Alinon !
Blood, blood ! and of kindred nature,
Which the young wolf returning
Shall dip his fangs in,
Thereby accursedly
Imbibing madness !

CHORUS.

The wild woman is uttering strange things
Fearful to listen to.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Within the house
Straightway confine her,
There to learn wisdom.

ÆGISTHUS.

Orestes — O, this child's life now outweighs
That mighty ruin, Agamemnon dead !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Ægisthus, dost thou love me ?

ÆGISTHUS.

As my life !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou lovest me ! O love, we have not failed.
Give me thy hand ! So . . . lead me to the house.
Let me lean on thee. I am very weak.

CHORUS.

Only Heaven is high.
Only the Gods are great.
Above the searchless sky,
In unremovéd state,
They from their golden mansions
Look over the lands, and the seas ;
The ocean's wide expansions,
And the earth's varieties :
Secure of their supremacy,
And sure of affluent ease.
Who shall say "I stand !" nor fall ?
Destiny is over all !
Rust will crumble old renown.
Bust and column tumble down ;
Keep and castle ; tower and town ;
Throne and sceptre ; crest and crown.
Destiny is over all !
One by one, the pale guests fall
At lighted feast, in palace hall ;
And feast is turned to funeral.
Who shall say "I stand !" nor fall ?
Destiny is over all !

GOOD-NIGHT IN THE PORCH.

A LITTLE longer in the light, love, let me be. The air is warm.
I hear the cuckoo's last good-night float from the copse below the Farm.
A little longer, Sister sweet, — your hand in mine, — on this old seat.

In yon red gable, which the rose creeps round and o'er, your casement shines
Against the yellow west, o'er those forlorn and solitary pines.
The long, long day is nearly done. How silent all the place is grown!

The stagnant levels, one and all, are burning in the distant marsh —
Hark! 't was the bittern's parting call. The frogs are out: with murmurs harsh
The low reeds vibrate. See! the sun catches the long pools one by one.

A moment, and those orange flats will turn dead gray or lurid white.
Look up! o'erhead the winnowing bats are come and gone, eluding sight.
The little worms are out. The snails begin to move down shining trails,

With slow pink cones, and soft wet horns. The garden-bowers are dim with dew.
With sparkling drops the white-rose thorns are twinkling, where the sun slips through
Those reefs of coral buds hung free below the purple Judas-tree.

From the warm upland comes a gust made fragrant with the brown hay there.
The meek cows, with their white horns thrust above the hedge, stand still and stare.
The steaming horses from the wains droop o'er the tank their plaited manes.

And o'er yon hillside brown and barren (where you and I as children played,
Starting the rabbit to his warren), I hear the sandy, shrill cascade
Leap down upon the vale, and spill his heart out round the muffled mill.

O can it be for nothing only that God has shown his world to me?
Or but to leave the heart more lonely with loss of beauty . . . can it be?
O closer, closer, Sister dear . . . nay, I have kist away that tear.

God bless you, Dear, for that kind thought which only upon tears could rise!
God bless you for the love that sought to hide them in those drooping eyes,
Whose lids I kiss! . . . poor lids, so red! but let my kiss fall there instead.

Yes, sad indeed it seems, each night, — and sadder, Dear, for your sweet sake!
To watch the last low lingering light, and know not where the morn may break.
To-night we sit together here. To-morrow night will come . . . ah, where?

O child! howe'er assured be faith, to say farewell is fraught with gloom,
When, like one flower, the germs of death and genius ripen toward the tomb;
And earth each day, as some fond face at parting, gains a graver grace.

There 's not a flower, there 's not a tree in this old garden where we sit,
But what some fragrant memory is closed and folded up in it.
To-night the dog-rose smells as wild, as fresh, as when I was a child.

'T is eight years since (do you forget?) we set those lilies near the wall:
You were a blue-eyed child: even yet I seem to see the ringlets fall, —
The golden ringlets, blown behind your shoulders in the merry wind.

Ah, me! old times, they cling, they cling! And oft by yonder green old gate
The field shows through, in morns of spring, an eager boy, I paused elate
With all sweet fancies loosed from school. And oft, you know, when eves were cool,

In summer-time, and through the trees young gnats began to be about,
With some old book upon your knees 't was here you watched the stars come out.
While oft, to please me, you sang through some foolish song I made for you.

And there 's my epic — I began when life seemed long, though longer art —
And all the glorious deeds of man made golden riot in my heart —
Eight books . . . it will not number nine! I die before my heroine.

Sister! they say that drowning men in one wild moment can recall
Their whole life long, and feel again the pain — the bliss — that thronged it all: —
Last night those phantoms of the Past again came crowding round me fast.

Near morning, when the lamp was low, against the wall they seemed to flit;
And, as the wavering light would glow or fall, they came and went with it.
The ghost of boyhood seemed to gaze down the dark verge of vanisht days.

Once more the garden where she walked on summer eves to tend her flowers,
Once more the lawn where first we talked of future years in twilight hours
Arose; once more she seemed to pass before me in the waving grass

To that old terrace; her bright hair about her warm neck all undone,
And waving on the balmy air, with tinges of the dying sun.
Just one star kindling in the west: just one bird singing near its nest.

So lovely, so beloved! O, fair as though that sun had never set
Which stayed upon her golden hair, in dreams I seem to see her yet!
To see her in that old green place, — the same husht, smiling, cruel face!

A little older, love, than you are now; and I was then a boy;
And wild and wayward-hearted too; to her my passion was a toy,
Soon broken! ah, a foolish thing, — a butterfly with crumpled wing!

Her hair, too, was like yours, — as bright, but with a warmer golden tinge:
Her eyes, — a somewhat deeper light, and dreamed below a longer fringe:
And still that strange grave smile she had stays in my heart and keeps it sad!

There 's no one knows it, truest friend, but you, for I have never breathed
To other ears the frozen end of those spring-garlands Hope once wreathed;
And death will come before again I breathe that name untouched by pain.

From little things — a star, a flower — that touched us with the self-same thought,
My passion deepened hour by hour, until to that fierce heat 't was wrought,
Which, shrivelling over every nerve, crumbled the outworks of reserve.

I told her then, in that wild time, the love I knew she long had seen;
The accusing pain that burned like crime, yet left me nobler than I had been;
What matter with what words I wooed her? She said I had misunderstood her.

And something more — small matter what! of friendship something — sister's love —
She said that I was young — knew not my own heart — as the years would prove —
She wished me happy — she conceived an interest in me — and believed

I should grow up to something great — and soon forget her — soon forget
This fancy — and congratulate my life she had released it, yet —
With more such words — a lie ! a lie ! She broke my heart, and flung it by !

A life's libation lifted up, from her proud lip she dashed untasted :
There trampled lay love's costly cup, and in the dust the wine was wasted.
She knew I could not pour such wine again at any other shrine.

Then I remember a numb mood : mad murmurings of the words she said :
A slow shame smouldering through my blood ; that surged and sung within my head :
And drunken sunlights reeling through the leaves : above, the burnisht blue

Hot on my eyes, — a blazing shield : a noise among the waterfalls :
A free crow up the brown cornfield floating at will : faint shepherd-calls :
And reapers reaping in the shocks of gold : and girls with purple frocks :

All which the more confused my brain : and nothing could I realize
But the great fact of my own pain : I saw the fields : I heard the cries :
The crow's shade dwindled up the hill : the world went on : my heart stood still.

I thought I held in my hot hand my life crusht up : I could have tost
The crumpled riddle from me, and laughed loud to think what I had lost.
A bitter strength was in my mind : like Samson, when she scorned him — blind,

And casting reckless arms about the props of life to hug them down, —
A madman with his eyes put out. But all my anger was my own.
I spared the worm upon my walk : I left the white rose on its stalk.

All 's over long since. Was it strange that I was mad with grief and shame ?
And I would cross the seas, and change my ancient home, my father's name ?
In the wild hope, if that might be, to change my own identity !

I know that I was wrong : I know it was not well to be so wild.
But the scorn stung so ! . . . Pity now could wound not ! . . . I have seen her child :
It had the self-same eyes she had : their gazing almost made me mad.

Dark violet eyes whose glances, deep with April hints of sunny tears,
'Neath long soft lashes laid asleep, seemed all too thoughtful for her years ;
As though from mine her gaze had caught the secret of some mournful thought.

But, when she spoke her father's air broke o'er her . . . that clear confident voice !
Some happy souls there are, that wear their nature lightly ; these rejoice
The world by living ; and receive from all men more than what they give.

One handful of their buoyant chaff exceeds our hoards of careful grain :
Because their love breaks through their laugh, while ours is fraught with tender pain :
The world, that knows itself too sad, is proud to keep some faces glad :

And, so it is ! from such an one Misfortune softly steps aside
To let him still walk in the sun. These things must be. I cannot chide.
Had I been she I might have made the self-same choice. She shunned the shade.

To some men God hath given laughter : but tears to some men He hath given :
He bade us sow in tears, hereafter to harvest holier smiles in Heaven :
And tears and smiles, they are His gift : both good, to smite or to uplift :

He knows His sheep: the wind and showers beat not too sharply the shorn lamb:
His wisdom is more wise than ours: He knew my nature — what I am:
He tempers smiles with tears: both good, to bear in time the Christian mood.

O yet — in scorn of mean relief, let Sorrow bear her heavenly fruit!
Better the wildest hour of grief than the low pastime of the brute!
Better to weep, for He wept too, than laugh as every fool can do!

For sure, 't were best to bear the cross; nor lightly fling the thorns behind;
Lest we grow happy by the loss of what was noblest in the mind.
— Here — in the ruins of my years — Father, I bless Thee through these tears!

It was in the far foreign lands this sickness came upon me first.
Below strange suns, 'mid alien hands, this fever of the south was nurst,
Until it reached some vital part. I die not of a broken heart.

O think not that! If I could live . . . there 's much to live for — worthy life.
It is not for what fame could give — though that I scorn not — but the strife
Were noble for its own sake too. I thought that I had much to do —

But God is wisest! Hark, again! . . . 't was yon black bittern, as he rose
Against the wild light o'er the fen. How red your little casement glows!
The night falls fast. How lonely, Dear, this bleak old house will look next year!

So sad a thought? . . . ah, yes! I know it is not good to brood on this:
And yet — such thoughts will come and go, unbidden. 'T is that you should miss,
My darling, one familiar tone of this weak voice when I am gone.

And, for what 's past, — I will not say in what she did that all was right,
But all 's forgiven; and I pray for her heart's welfare, day and night.
All things are changed! This cheek would glow even near hers but faintly now!

Thou — God! before whose sleepless eye not even in vain the sparrows fall,
Receive, sustain me! Sanctify my soul. Thou know'st, Thou lovest all.
Too weak to walk alone — I see Thy hand: I falter back to Thee.

Saved from the curse of time which throws its baseness on us day by day:
Its wretched joys, and worthless woes; till all the heart is worn away.
I feel Thee near. I hold my breath, by the half-open doors of Death.

And sometimes, glimpses from within of glory (wondrous sight and sound!)
Float near me: — faces pure from sin; strange music; saints with splendor crowned:
I seem to feel my native air blow down from some high region there,

And fan my spirit pure: I rise above the sense of loss and pain:
Faint forms that lured my childhood's eyes, long lost, I seem to find again:
I see the end of all: I feel hope, awe, no language can reveal.

Forgive me, Lord, if overmuch I loved that form Thou mad'st so fair;
I know that Thou didst make her such; and fair but as the flowers were, —
Thy work: her beauty was but Thine; the human less than the divine.

My life hath been one search for Thee 'mid thorns found red with Thy dear blood:
In many a dark Gethsemanë I seemed to stand where Thou hadst stood:
And, scorned in this world's Judgment-Place, at times, through tears, to catch
Thy face.

Thou suffered'st here, and didst not fail: Thy bleeding feet these paths have trod:
But Thou wert strong, and I am frail: and I am man, and Thou wert God.
Be near me: keep me in Thy sight: or lay my soul asleep in light.

O to be where the meanest mind is more than Shakespeare! where one look
Shows more than here the wise can find, though toiling slow from book to book!
Where life is knowledge: love is sure: and hope's brief promise made secure.

O dying voice of human praise! the crude ambitions of my youth!
I long to pour immortal lays! great pæans of perennial Truth!
A larger work! a loftier aim! . . . and what are laurel-leaves, and fame?

And what are words? How little these the silence of the soul express!
Mere froth, — the foam and flower of seas whose hungering waters heave and press
Against the planets and the sides of night, — mute, yearning, mystic tides!

To ease the heart with song is sweet: sweet to be heard if heard by love.
And you have heard me. When we meet shall we not sing the old songs above
To grander music? Sweet, one kiss. O blest it is to die like this!

To lapse from being without pain: your hand in mine, on mine your heart·
The unshaken faith to meet again that sheathes the pang with which we part:
My head upon your bosom, sweet: your hand in mine, on this old seat!

So; closer wind that tender arm . . . How the hot tears fall! Do not weep,
Beloved, but let your smile stay warm about me. "In the Lord they sleep."
You know the words the Scripture saith . . . O light, O Glory! . . . is this death?

THE EARL'S RETURN.

Ragged and tall stood the castle wall
And the squires, at their sport, in the great South Court,
Lounged all day long from stable to hall
Laughingly, lazily, one and all.
The land about was barren and blue,
And swept by the wing of the wet sea-mew.
Seven fishermen's huts on a shelly shore:
Sand-heaps behind, and sand-banks before:
And a black champaign streaked white all through
To a great salt pool which the ocean drew,
Sucked into itself, and disgorged it again
To stagnate and steam on the mineral plain;
Not a tree or a bush in the circle of sight,
But a bare black thorn which the sea-winds had withered
With the drifting scum of the surf and blight,
And some patches of gray grass-land to the right,
Where the lean red-hided cattle were tethered:
A reef of rock wedged the water in twain,
And a stout stone tower stood square to the main.

And the flakes of the spray that were jerked away
From the froth on the lip of the bleak blue sea
Were sometimes flung by the wind, as it swung
Over turret and terrace and balcony,
To the garden below where, in desolate corners
Under the mossy green parapet there,
The lilies crouched, rocking their white heads like mourners,
And burned off the heads of the flowers that were

Pining and pale in their comfortless bowers,
Dry-bushed with the sharp stubborn lavender,
And paven with disks of the torn sunflowers,
Which, day by day, were strangled, and stripped
Of their ravelling fringes and brazen bosses,
And the hardy mary-buds nipped and ripped
Into shreds for the beetles that lurked in the mosses.

Here she lived alone, and from year to year
She saw the black belt of the ocean appear
At her casement each morn as she rose; and each morn
Her eye fell first on the bare black thorn.
This was all: nothing more: or sometimes on the shore
The fishermen sang when the fishing was o'er;
Or the lowing of oxen fell dreamily,
Close on the shut of the glimmering eves,
Through some gusty pause in the moaning sea,
When the pools were splashed pink by the thirsty beeves.
Or sometimes, when the pearl-lighted morns drew the tinges
Of the cold sunrise up their amber fringes,
A white sail peered over the rim of the main,
Looked all about o'er the empty sea,
Staggered back from the fine line of white light again,
And dropped down to another world silently.
Then she breathed freer. With sickening dread
She had watched five pale young moons unfold
From their notchy cavern in light, and spread
To the fuller light, and again grow old,
And dwindle away to a luminous shred.
"He will not come back till the Spring's green and gold.
And I would that I with the leaves were dead,
Quiet somewhere with them in the moss and the mould,
When he and the summer come this way," she said.

And when the dull sky darkened down to the edges,
And the keen frost kindled in star and spar,
The sea might be known by a noise on the ledges
Of the long crags, gathering power from afar
Through his roaring bays, and crawling back
Hissing, as o'er the wet pebbles he dragged
His skirt of foam frayed, dripping, and jagged,
And reluctantly fell down the smooth hollow shell
Of the night, whose lustrous surface of black
In spots to an intense blue was worn.
But later, when up on the sullen sea-bar
The wide large-lighted moon had arisen,
Where the dark and voluminous ocean grew luminous,
Helping after her slowly one little shy star
That shook blue in the cold, and looked forlorn,
The clouds were troubled, and the wind from his prison
Behind them leaped down with a light laugh of scorn;
Then the last thing she saw was that bare black thorn;
For the forkéd tree, as the bleak blast took it,
Howled through it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,
Seemed to visibly waste and wither and wizen.

And the snow was lifted into the air
Layer by layer,
And turned into vast white clouds that flew
Silent and fleet up the sky, and were riven
And jerked into chasms which the sun leaped through,
Opening crystal gulfs of a breezy blue
Fed with rainy lights of the April heaven.
From eaves and leaves the quivering dew
Sparkled off; and the rich earth, black and bare,
Was starred with snowdrops everywhere;
And the crocus upturned its flame, and burned
Here and there.

"The Summer," she said, "cometh blithe and bold;
And the crocus is lit for her welcoming;
And the days will have garments of purple and gold;
But I would be left by the pale green Spring
With the snowdrops somewhere under the mould;
For I dare not think what the Summer may bring."

Pale she was as the bramble blooms
That fill the long fields with their faint perfumes,
When the May-wind flits finely through sun-threaded showers,
Breathing low to himself in his dim meadow-bowers.
And her cheek each year was paler and thinner,
And white as the pearl that was hung at her ear,
As her sad heart sickened and pined within her,
And failed and fainted from year to year.
So that the Seneschal, rough and gray,
Said, as he looked in her face one day,
"St. Catherine save all good souls, I pray,
For our pale young lady is paling away.
O the Saints," he said, smiling bitter and grim,
"Know she's too fair and too good for him!"
Sometimes she walked on the upper leads,
And leaned on the arm of the weather-worn Warden.
Sometimes she sat 'twixt the mildewy beds
Of the sea-singed flowers in the Pleasaunce Garden.
Till the rotting blooms that lay thick on the walks
Were combed by the white sea-gust like a rake,
And the stimulant steam of the leaves and stalks
Made the coiléd memory, numb and cold,
That slept in her heart like a dreaming snake,
Drowsily lift itself fold by fold,
And gnaw and gnaw hungrily, half awake.

Sometimes she looked from the window below
To the great South Court, and the squires, at their sport,
Loungingly loitering to and fro.
She heard the grooms there as they cursed one another.
She heard the great bowls falling all day long
In the bowling-alleys. She heard the song
Of the shock-headed Pages that drank without stint in
The echoing courts, and swore hard at each other.
She saw the red face of the rough wooden Quintin,
And the swinging sand-bag ready to smother
The awkward Squire that missed the mark.
And, all day long, between the dull noises
Of the bowls, and the oaths, and the singing voices,
The sea boomed hoarse till the skies were dark.

But when the swallow, that sweet newcomer,
Floated over the sea in the front of the summer,
The salt dry sands burned white, and sickened
Men's sight in the glaring horn of the bay;
And all things that fasten, or float at ease
In the silvery light of the leprous seas
With the pulse of a hideous life were quickened,
Fell loose from the rocks, and crawled crosswise away,
Slippery sidelong crabs, half strangled
By the white sea grasses in which they were tangled,
And those half-living creatures, orbed, rayed, and sharp-angled,
Fan-fish, and star-fish, and polypous lumps,
Hueless and boneless, that languidly thickened,
Or flat-faced, or spikéd, or ridgéd with humps,
Melting off from their clotted clusters and clumps
Sprawled over the shore in the heat of the day.

An hour before the sun was set
A darker ripple rolled over the sea;

The white rocks quivered in wells of jet;
And the great West, opening breathlessly
Up all his inmost orange, gave
Hints of something distant and sweet
That made her heart swell; far up the wave
The clouds that lay piled in the golden heat
Were turned into types of the ancient mountains
In an ancient land; the weeds, which forlorn
Waves were swaying neglectfully,
By their sound, as they dipped into sparkles that dripped
In the emerald creeks that ran up from the shore,
Brought back to her fancy the bubble of fountains
Leaping and falling continually
In valleys where she should wander no more.

And when, over all of these, the night
Among her mazy and milk-white signs,
And clustered orbs, and zigzag lines,
Burst into blossom of stars and light,
The sea was glassy; the glassy brine
Was paven with lights, — blue, crystalline,
And emerald keen; the dark world hung
Balanced under the moon, and swung
In a net of silver sparkles. Then she
Rippled her yellow hair to her knee,
Bared her warm white bosom and throat,
And from the lattice leaned athirst.
There, on the silence did she gloat
With a dizzy pleasure steeped in pain,
Half catching the soul of the secret that blended
God with his starlight, then feeling it vain,
Like a pining poet ready to burst
With the weight of the wonder that grows in his brain,
Or a nightingale, mute at the sound of a lute
That is swelling and breaking his heart with its strain,
Waiting, breathless, to die when the music is ended.
For the sleek and beautiful midnight stole,
Like a faithless friend, her secret care,
Crept through each pore to the source of the soul,
And mocked at the anguish which he found there,
Shining away from her, scornful and fair
In his pitiless beauty, refusing to share
The discontent which he could not control.

The water-rat, as he skulked in the moat,
Set all the slumbrous lilies afloat,
And sent a sharp quick pulse along
The stagnant light, that heaved and swung
The leaves together. Suddenly
At times a shooting star would spin
Shell-like out of heaven, and tumble in,
And burst o'er a city of stars; but she,
As he dashed on the back of the zodiac,
And quivered and glowed down arc and node,
And split sparkling into infinity,
Thought that some angel, in his reveries
Thinking of earth, as he pensively
Leaned over the star-grated balcony
In his palace among the Pleiades,
And grieved for the sorrow he saw in the land,
Had dropped a white lily from his loose hand.

And thus many a night, steeped pale in the light
Of the stars, when the bells and clocks
Had ceased in the towers, and the sound of the hours
Was eddying about in the rocks,
Deep-sunken in bristling broidery between the black oak Fiends sat she,
And under the moth-flitted canopy
Of the mighty antique bed in her chamber,
With wild eyes drinking up the sea,
And her white hands heavy with jewelry,
Flashing as she loosed languidly
Her satins of snow and of amber.
And as, fold by fold, these were rippled and rolled
To her feet, and lay huddled in ruins of gold,
She looked like some pale spirit above
Earth's dazzling passions forever flung by,
Freed from the stains of an earthly love,
And those splendid shackles of pride that press
On the heart till it aches with the gorgeous stress,

Quitting the base Past remorsefully.
And so she put by the coil and care
Of the day that lay furled like an idle weft
Of heapéd spots which a bright snake hath left,
Or that dark house, the blind worm's lair,
When the star-wingéd moth from the windows hath crept,
Steeped her soul in a tearful prayer,
Shrank into her naked self, and slept.

And as she slumbered, starred and eyed
All over with angry gems, at her side,
The Fiends in the oak kept ward and watch ;
And the querulous clock, on its rusty catch,
With a quick tick, husky and thick,
Clamored and clacked at her sharply. There was
(Fronting a portrait of the Earl)
A shrine with a dim green lamp, and a cross
Of glowing cedar wreathed with pearl,
Which the Arimathæan, so it was writ,
When he came from the holy Orient,
Had worn, with his prayers embalming it,
As with the San-Grael through the world he went.
Underneath were relics and gems
From many an antique king-saint's crown,
And some ('t was avouched) from the dusk diadems
And mighty rings of those Wise Kings
That evermore sleep 'mid the marble stems,
'Twixt chancel and chalice in God his palace,
The marvel of Cologne Town.
In a halo dim of the lamp all night
Smiled the sad Virgin, holy and white,
With a face as full of the soul's affliction
As one that had looked on the Crucifixion.

At moonrise the land was suddenly brighter ;
And through all its length and breadth the casement
Grew large with a luminous strange amazement,
And, as doubting in dreams what that sudden blaze meant,
The Lady's white face turned a thought whiter.
Sometimes in sleep light finger-tips
Touched her behind ; the pain, the bliss
Of a long slow despairing kiss
Doubled the heat on her feverish lips,
And down to her heart's-heart smouldering burned ;
From lips long mute she heard her name ;
Sad dreams and sweet to vex her came ;
Sighing, upon her pillow she turned,
Like a weary waif on a weary sea
That is heaving over continually,
And finds no course, until for its sake
The heart of the silence begins to ache.
Unsoothed from slumber she awoke
An hour ere dawn. The lamp burned faint.
The Fiends glared at her out of the oak.
She rose, and fell at the shrine of the Saint.
There with claspéd hands to the Mother
Of many sorrows, in sorrow, she prayed ;
Till all things in the room melted into each other,
And vanished in gyres of flickering shade,
Leaving her all alone, with the face
Of the Saint growing large in its one bright place.
Then on a sudden, from far, a fear
Through all her heart its horror drew,
As of something hideous growing near.
Cold fingers seemed roaming through her damp hair ;
Her lips were locked. The power of prayer
Left her. She dared not turn. She knew,
From his panel atilt on the wall up there,
The grim Earl was gazing her through and through.

But when the casement, a grisly square,
Flickered with day, she flung it wide,
And looked below. The shore was bare.
In the mist tumbled the dismal tide.
One ghastly pool seemed solid white ;
The forkéd shadow of the thorn
Fell through it, like a raven rent
In the steadfast blank down which it went.
The blind world slowly gathered sight.
The sea was moaning on to morn.

And the Summer into the Autumn waned.
And under the watery Hyades
The gray sea swelled, and the thick sky rained,
And the land was darkened by slow degrees.

But oft, in the low West, the day
Smouldering sent up a sullen flame
Along the dreary waste of gray,
As though in that red region lay,
Heaped up, like Autumn weeds and flowers
For fire, its thorny fruitless hours,
And God said, "burn it all away!"

When all was dreariest in the skies,
And the gusty tract of twilight muttered,
A strange slow smile grew into her eyes,
As though from a great way off it came
And was weary ere down to her lips it fluttered,
And turned into a sigh, or some soft name
Whose syllables sounded likest sighs,
Half smothered in sorrow before they were uttered.
Sometimes, at night, a music was rolled—
A ripple of silver harp-strings cold—
From the halls below where the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair, and the golden tongue,
And the eyes of passionless, peaceful blue
(Like twilight which faint stars gaze through),
Wise with the years which no man knew.
And first the music, as though the wings
Of some blind angel were caught in the strings,
Fluttered with weak endeavor: anon
The uncaged heart of music grew bold
And cautiously loosened, length by length,
The golden cone of its great undertone,
Like a strong man using mild language to one
That is weaker, because he is sure of his strength.

But once—and it was at the fall of the day,
When she, if she closed her eyes, did seem
To be wandering far, in a sort of dream,
With some lost shadow, away, away,
Down the heart of a golden land which she
Remembered a great way over the sea,
There came a trample of horses and men;
And a blowing of horns at the Castle-Gate;
Then a clattering noise; then a pause; and then,
With the sudden jerk of a heavy weight,
And a wrangling and jangling and clinking and clanking,
The sound of the falling of cable and chain;
And a grumbling over the dewy planking
That shrieked and sung with the weight and strain;
And the rough Seneschal bawled out in the hall,
"The Earl and the Devil are come back again!"

Her heart stood still for a moment or more.
Then suddenly tugged, and strained, and tore
At the roots, which seemed to give way beneath.
She rushed to the window, and held her breath.
High up on the beach were the long black ships
And the brown sails hung from the masts in strips;
And the surf was whirled over and over them,
And swept them dripping from stern to stem.
Within, in the great square court below,
Were a hundred rough-faced men, or so.
And one or two pale fair-haired slaves
Whom the Earl had brought over the winter waves.

There was a wringing of horny hands;
And a swearing of oaths; and a great deal of laughter;
The grim Earl growling his hoarse commands
To the Warden that followed him growling after;
A lowing of cattle along the wet sands;
And a plashing of hoofs on the slippery rafter,
As the long-tailed black-maned horses each
Went over the bridge from the gray sea-beach.

Then quoth the grim Earl, "fetch me a stoop!"
And they brought him a great bowl that dripped from the brim,
Which he seized upon with a satisfied whoop,
Drained, and flung at the head of him
That brought it; then, with a laugh like a howl,
Stroked his beard; and strode in through the door with a growl.

Meanwhile the pale lady grew white and whiter,
As the poplar pales when the keen winds smite her :
And, as the tree sways to the gust, and heaves
Quick ripples of white alarm up the leaves,
So did she seem to shrink and reel
From the casement — one quiver from head to heel
Of whitest fear. For she heard below,
On the creaking stairway loud and slow,
Like drops that plunge audibly down from the thunder
Into a sea that is groaning under,
The heavy foot of the Earl as he mounted
Step after step to the turret : she counted
Step after step, as he hastened or halted ;
Now clashing shrill through the arch-ways vaulted ;
Now muffled and thick ; now loud, and more
Loud as he came near the Chamber door.
Then there fell, with a rattle and shock,
An iron glove on the iron lock,
And the door burst open — the Earl burst through it —
But she saw him not. The window-pane,
Far off, grew large and small again ;
The staggering light did wax and wane,
Till there came a snap of the heavy brain ;
And a slow-subsiding pulse of pain ;
And the whole world darkened into rest,
As the grim Earl pressed to his grausome breast
His white wife. She hung heavy there
On his shoulder without breath,
Darkly filled with sleepy death
From her heart up to her eyes ;
Dead asleep : and ere he knew it
(How Death took her by surprise
Helpless in her great despair)
Smoothing back her yellow hair,
He kissed her icy brows ; unwound
His rough arms, and she fell to the ground.

"The woman was fairer than she was wise:
But the serpent was wiser than she was fair :
For the serpent was lord in Paradise
Or ever the woman came there.
But when Eden-gates were barred amain,
And the fiery sword on guard in the East,
The lion arose from a long repose,
And quoth he, as he shook out his royal mane,
'Now I am the strongest beast.'
Had the woman been wiser when she was queen
The lion had never been king, I ween.
But ever since storms began to lower
Beauty on earth hath been second to Power."
And this is the song that the Minstrel sung,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
Who sung by night in the grim Earl's hall.
And they held him in reverence one and all.

And so she died, — the pale-faced girl.
And, for nine days after that, the Earl
Fumed and fret, and raved and swore,
Pacing up and down the chamber-floor,
And tearing his black beard as he went,
In the fit of his sullen discontent.
And the Seneschal said it was fearful to hear him ;
And not even the weather-worn Warden went near him ;
And the shock-headed Pages huddled anear,
And bit their white lips till they bled, for fear.

But at last he bade them lift her lightly,
And bury her by the gray sea-shore,
Where the winds that blew from her own land nightly
Might wail round her grave through the wild rocks hoar.
So they lifted her lightly at dead of night,
And bore her down by the long torch-light, —
Lank-haired faces, sallow and keen,
That burned out of the glassy pools between
The splashing sands which, as they plunged through,
The coffin-lead weighed them down into ;
And their feet, as they plucked them up, left pits
Which the water oozed into and out of by fits —
— And so to the deep-mouthed bay's black brim,
Where the pale priests, all white-stoled and dim,
Lifted the cross and chanted the hymn,
That her soul might have peace when her bones were dust,
And her name be written among the Just.

The Warden walked after the Seneschal grim;
And the shock-headed Pages walked after him:
And with mattock and spade a grave was made,
Where they carved the cross, and they wrote her name,
And, returning each by the way that he came,
They left her under the bare black thorn.

The salt sea-wind sang shrill in the head of it;
And the bitter night grew chill with the dread of it;
When the great round moon rose up forlorn
From the reefs, and whitened towards the morn.
For the forkéd tree, as the bleak blast took it,
Howled through it, and beat it, and bit it, and shook it,
Like a living thing bewitched and bedeviled.
Visibly shrunk, and shuddered and shrivelled.

And again the swallow, that false newcomer,
Fluttered over the sea in the front of the summer;
A careless singer, as he should be
That only skimmeth the mighty sea;
Dipped his wings as he came and went,
And chirruped and twittered for heart's content,
And built on the new-made grave. But when
The Summer was over he flew back again.

And the Earl, as years went by, and his life
Grew listless, took him another wife:
And the Seneschal grim and the Warden gray
Walked about in their wonted way:
And the lean-jawed shock-haired Pages too
Sung and swilled as they used to do.
And the grooms and the squires gamed and swore
And quarrelled again as they quarrelled before;
And the flowers decayed in their dismal beds,
And dropped off from their lean shanks one by one,
Till nothing was left but the stalks and the heads,
Clumped into heaps, or ripped into shreds,
To steam into salt in the sickly sun.

And the cattle lowed late up the glimmering plain,
Or dipped knee-deep, and splashed themselves
In the pools spat out by the spiteful main,
Wallowing in sandy dikes and delves:
And the blear-eyed filmy sea did boom
With his old mysterious hungering sound:
And the wet wind wailed in the chinks of the tomb,
Till the weeds in the surf were drenched and drowned.
But once a stranger came over the wave,
And paused by the pale-faced Lady's grave.

It was when, just about to set,
A sadness held the sinking sun.
The moon delayed to shine as yet:
The Ave-Mary chime was done:
And from the bell-tower leaned the ringers;
And in the chancel paused the singers,
With lingering looks, and claspéd fingers:
And the day reluctantly turned to his rest,
Like some untold life, that leaves exprest
But the half of its hungering love ere it close:
So he went sadly toward his repose
Deep in the heart of the slumbrous waves
Kindled far off in the desolate West.
And the breeze sprang up in the cool sea-caves,
The castle stood with its courts in shade,
And all its toothéd towers imprest
On the sorrowful light that sunset made, —
Such a light as sleeps shut up in the breast
Of some pining crimson-hearted rose,
Which, as you gaze at it, grows and grows
And all the warm leaves overflows;
Leaving its sweet source still to be guest.
The crumpled shadow of the thorn
Crawled over the sand-heaps raggedly,
And over the gray stone cross forlorn,
And on to that one man musing there
Moveless, while o'er him the night crept on,

And the hot yellow stars, slowly, one after one,
Mounted into the dark blue air
And brightened, and brightened. Then suddenly,
And sadly and silently,
Down the dim breezy brink of the sea sank the sun.

Ere the moon was abroad, the owl
Made himself heard in the echoing tower
Three times, four times. The bat with his cowl
Came and went round the lonely Bower
Where dwelt of yore the Earl's lost Lady.
There night after night, for years, in vain
The lingering moon had looked through the pane,
And missed the face she used to find there,
White and wan like some mountain flower
In its rocky nook, as it paled and pined there,
Only known to the moon and the wind there.
Lights flitted faint in the halls down lower
From lattice to lattice, and then glowed steady.

The dipping gull: and the long gray pool:
And the reed that shows which way the breeze blows cool,
From the wide warm sea to the low black land:
And the wave makes no sound on the soft yellow sand:
But the inland shallows sharp and small
Are swarmed about with the sultry midge.
And the land is still, and the ocean still:
And the weeds in the rifted rocks at will
Move on the tide, and float or glide.
And into the silent western side
Of the heaven the moon begins to fall.
But is it the fall of a plover's call
That is answered warily, low yet shrill,
From the sand-heapt mound and the rocky ridge?
And now o'er the dark plain so wild and wide
Falls the note of a horn from the old drawbridge.

Who is it that waits at the castle-gates?
Call in the minstrel, and fill the bowl.
Bid him loose the great music and let the song roll.
Fill the bowl.
And first, as was due, to the Earl he bowed:
Next to all the Sea-chieftains, blithe friends of the Earl's:
Then advanced through the praise of the murmuring crowd,
And sat down, as they bade him, and all his black curls
Bowed over his harp, as in doubt which to choose
From the melodies coiled at his heart. For a man
O'er some Beauty asleep for one moment might muse,
Half in love, ere he woke her. So ere he began,
He paused over his song. And they brought him, the Squires,
A heavy gold cup with the red wine ripe in it,
Then wave over wave of the sweet silver wires
'Gan ripple, and the minstrel took heart to begin it.

A harper that harps thorough mountain and glen,
Wandering, wandering the wide world over,
Sweetest of singers, yet saddest of men,
His soul's lost Lady in vain to discover.
Most fair and most frail of the daughters of men,
O blest and O curst, the man that should love her!
Who has not loved? and who has not lost?
Wherever he wander, the wide world over,
Singing by city, and castle, and plain,
Abiding never, forever a rover,
Each man that shall hear him will swear almost
In the minstrel's song that his heart can discover
The self-same lady by whom it was crost,
For love is love the wide world over.

What shall he liken his love unto?
Have you seen some cloud the sun sets through,
When the lingering night is close at hand?
Have you seen some rose lie on the snow?

Or a summer bird in a winter land ?
Or a lily dying for dearth of dew ?
Or a pearl sea-cast on a barren strand ?
Some garden never sunshine warms
Nor any tend ? some lonely tree
That stretches bleak its barren arms
Turned inland from the blighting sea ?
Her cheek was pale : her face was fair :
Her heart, he sung, was weak and warm ;
All golden was the sleepy hair
That floated round about her form,
And hid the sweetness breathing there.
Her eyes were wild, like stars that shine
Far off in summer nights divine :
But her smile — it was like the golden wine
Poured into the spirit, as into a cup,
With passion brimming it up and up,
And marvellous fancies fair and fine.
He took her hair to make sweet strings :
He hid her smile deep in his song.
This makes so rich the tune he sings
That o'er the world 't will linger long.

There is a land far, far away from yours.
And there the stars are thrice as bright as these.
And there the nightingale strange music pours
All day out of the hearts of myrtle-trees.
There the voice of the cuckoo sounds never forlorn
As you hear it far off through the deep purple valleys.
And the fire-fly dances by night in the corn.
And the little round owls in the long cypress alleys
Whoop for joy when the moon is born.
There ripen the olive and the tulip tree,
And in the sun broadens the green prickly pear ;
And the bright galingales in the grass you may see ;
And the vine, with her royal blue globes, dwelleth there,
Climbing and hanging deliciously
By every doorway and lone latticed chamber,
Where the damsel-fly flits, and the heavy brown bee
Hums alone, and the quick lizards rustle and clamber.
And all things, there, live and rejoice together,
From the frail peach-blossom that first appears
When birds are about in the blue summer weather,
To the oak that has lived through his eight hundred years.
And the castles are built on the hills, not the plains.
(And the wild wind-flowers burn about in the courts there)
They are white and undrenched by the gray winter rains.
And the swallows, and all things, are blithe at their sports there.
O for one moment, at sunset, to stand
Far, far away, in that dear distant land
Whence they bore her, — the loveliest lady that ever
Crost the bleak ocean. O, nevermore, never,
Shall she stand with her feet in the warm dry grasses
Where the faint balm-heaving breeze heavily passes
And the white lotus-flower leans lone on the river.

Rare were the gems which she had for her dower.
But all the wild-flowers she left behind her.
— A broken heart and a rose-roofed bower.
O oft, and in many a desolate hour,
The cold strange faces she sees shall remind her
Of hearts that were warmer, and smiles that were kinder,
Lost, like the roses they plucked from her bower !
Lonely and far from her own land they laid her !
— A swallow flew over the sea to find her.
Ah cold, cold and narrow, the bed that they made her !
The swallow went forth with the summer to find her.
The summer and the swallow came back o'er the sea,
And strange were the tidings the bird brought to me.

And the minstrel sung, and they praised and listened, —
Gazed and praised while the minstrel sung.
Flusht was each cheek, and each fixt eye glistened,

And husht was each voice to the minstrel's tongue.
But the Earl grew paler more and more
As the song of the Singer grew louder and clearer,
And so dumb was the hall, you might hear the roar
Of the sea in its pauses grow nearer and drearer.
And . . . hush ! hush ! hush !
O was it the wind ? or was it the rush
Of the restless waters that tumble and splash
On the wild sea-rocks ? or was it the crash
Of stones on the old wet bridge up there ?
Or the sound of the tempest come over the main ?
— Nay, but just now the night was fair.
Was it the march of the midnight rain
Clattering down in the courts ? or the crash
Of armor yonder ? . . . Listen again !

Can it be lightning ? — can it be thunder ?
For a light is all round the lurid hall
That reddens and reddens the windows all,
And far away you may hear the fall
As of rafter and bowlder splitting asunder.
It is not the thunder, and it is not the lightning
To which the castle is sounding and brightening,
But something worse than lightning or thunder ;
For what is this that is coming yonder ?

Which way ? Here ! Where ?
Call the men ! . . . Is it there ?
Call them out ! Ring the bell !
Ring the Fiend back to Hell !
Ring, ring the alarum for mercy ! . . . Too late !
It has crawled up the walls — it has burst in the gate —
It looks through the windows — it creeps near the hall —
Near, more near — red and clear —
It is here !
Now the saints save us all !

And little, in truth, boots it ringing the bell.
For the fire is loose on its way one may tell
By the hot simmering whispers and humming up there
In the oak-beams and rafters. Now one of the Squires
His elbow hath thrust through the half-smouldered door, —
Such a hole as some rat for his brown wife might bore, —
And straightway in snaky, white, wavering spires
The thin smoke twirls through, and spreads eddying in gyres
Here and there toucht with vanishing tints from the glare
That has swathed in its rose-light the sharp turret stair.
Soon the door ruined through : and in tumbled a cloud
Of black vapor. And first 't was all blackness, and then
The quick forkéd fires leapt out from their shroud
In the blackness : and through it rushed in the armed men
From the court-yard. And then there was flying and fighting,
And praying and cursing, — confusion confounded.
Each man, at wild hazard, through smoke ramparts smiting,
Has struck . . . is it friend ? is it foe ? Who is wounded ?

But the Earl, — who last saw him ? Who cares ? who knows ?
Some one, no doubt, by the weight of his blows.
And they all, at times, heard his oath, — so they swore : —
Such a cry as some speared wild beast might give vent to
When the lean dogs are on him, and forth with that roar
Of desolate wrath, the life is sent too.
If he die, he will die with the dying about him,
And his red wet sword in his hand, never doubt him :
If he live, perchance he will bear his new bride
Through them all, past the bridge, to the wild seaside.
And there, whether he leave, or keep his wife still,
There 's the free sea round him, new lands, and new life still.

And . . . but ah, the red light there!
And high up and higher
The soft, warm, vivid sparkles crowd kindling, and wander
Far away down the breathless blue cone of the night.
Saints! can it be that the ships are on fire,
Those fierce hot clots of crimson light,
Brightening, whitening in the distance yonder?
Slowly over the slumbrous dark
Up from those fountains of fire spark on spark
(You might count them almost) floats silent: and clear
In the steadfast glow the great cross-beams,
And the sharp and delicate masts show black;
While wider and higher the red light streams,
And oozes and overflows at the back.
Then faint through the distance a sound you hear,
And the bare poles totter and disappear.

Of the Earl, in truth, the Seneschal swore
(And over the ocean this tale he bore)
That when, as he fled on that last wild night,
He had gained the other side of the moat,
Dripping, he shook off his wet leathern coat,
And turning round beheld, from basement
To cope, the castle swathed in light,
And, revealed in the glare through My Lady's casement,
He saw, or dreamed he saw, this sight —

Two forms (and one for the Earl's he knew,
By the long shaggy beard and the broad back too)
Struggling, grappling, like things half human.
The other, he said, he but vaguely distinguished,
When a sound like the shriek of an agonized woman
Made him shudder, and lo, all the vision was gone!
Ceiling and floor had fallen through,
In a glut of vomited flame extinguished;
And the still fire rose and broadened on.
How fearful a thing is fire!
You might make up your mind to die by water
A slow cool death, — nay, at times, when weary
Of pains that pass not, and pleasures that pall,
When the temples throb, and the heart is dreary
And life is dried up, you could even desire
Through the flat green weeds to fall and fall
Half asleep down the green light under them all,
As in a dream, while all things seem
Wavering, wavering, to feel the stream
Wind, and gurgle, and sound and gleam.
And who would very much fear to expire
By steel, in the front of victorious slaughter,
The blithe battle about him, and comrades in call?
But to die by fire —
O that night in the hall!

And the castle burned from base to top.
You had thought that the fire would never stop,
For it roared like the great north-wind in the pines,
And shone as the boreal meteor shines
Watched by wild hunters in shuddering bands,
When wolves are about in the icy lands.
From the sea you might mark for a space of three days,
Or fainter or fiercer, the dull red blaze.
And when this ceased, the smoke above it
Hung so heavy not even the wind seemed to move it;
So it glared and groaned, and night after night
Smouldered, — a terrible beacon-light.

Now the Earl' s old minstrel, — he that had sung
His youth out in those halls, — the man beloved,
With the silver hair and the golden tongue,
They bore him out from the fire; but he roved
Back to the stifled courts; and there
They watched him hovering, day after day,
To and fro, with his long white hair

And his gold harp, chanting a lonely lay;
Chanting and changing it o'er and o'er,
Like the mournful mad melodious breath
Of some wild swan singing himself to death,
As he floats down a strange land leagues away.
One day the song ceased. They heard it no more.

Did you ever an Alpine eagle see
Come down from flying near the sun
To find his eyrie all undone
On lonely cliffs where chance hath led
Some spying thief the brood to plunder?
How hangs he desolate overhead,
And circling now aloft, now under,
His ruined home screams round and round,
Then drops flat fluttering to the ground.
So moaning round the roofs they saw him,
With his gleaming harp and his vesture white:
Going, and coming, and ever returning
To those chambers, emptied of beauty and state
And choked with blackness and ruin and burning;

Then, as some instinct seemed to draw him,
Like hidden hands, down to his fate,
He paused, plunged, dropped forever from sight;
And a cone of smoke and sparkles rolled up,
As out of some troubled crater-cup.

As for the rest, some died; some fled
Over the sea, nor ever returned.
But until to the living return the dead,
And they each shall stand and take their station
Again at the last great conflagration,
Never more will be seen the Earl or the stranger.
No doubt there is much here that's fit to be burned.
Christ save us all in that day from the danger!

And this is why these fishermen say,
Sitting alone in their boats on the bay,
When the moon is low in the wild windy nights,
They hear strange sounds, and see strange sights.
Spectres gathering all forlorn
Under the boughs of this bare black thorn.

A SOUL'S LOSS.

"If Beauty have a soul this is not she." — TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

'TWIXT the Future and the Past
There 's a moment. It is o'er.
Kiss sad hands! we part at last.
I am on the other shore.
Fly, stern Hour! and hasten fast.
Nobler things are gone before.

From the dark of dying years
Grows a face with violet eyes,
Tremulous through tender tears, —
Warm lips heavy with rich sighs, —
Ah, they fade! it disappears,
And with it my whole heart dies!

Dies . . . and this choked world is sickening;
Truth has nowhere room for breath.
Crusts of falsehood, slowly thickening
From the rottenness beneath
These rank social forms, are quickening
To a loathsome life-in-death.

O those devil's market-places!
Knowing, nightly, she was there,
Can I marvel that the traces
On her spirit are not fair?
I forgot that air debases
When I knew she breathed such air.

This a fair immortal spirit
For which God prepared his spheres?
What! shall this the stars inherit?
And the worth of honest tears?
A fool's fancy all its merit!
A fool's judgment all its fears!

No, she loves no other! No,
That is lost which she gave me.
Is this comfort, — that I know
All her spirit's poverty?
When that dry soul is drained low,
His who wills the dregs may be!

Peace! I trust a heart forlorn
Weakly upon boisterous speech.
Pity were more fit than scorn.
Fingered moth, and bloomless peach!
Gathered rose without a thorn,
Set to fleer in all men's reach!

I am clothed with her disgrace.
O her shame is made my own!
O I reel from my high place!
All belief is overthrown.
What! This whirligig of lace,
This the Queen that I have known?

Starry Queen that did confer
Beauty on the barren earth!
Woodlands, wandered oft with her
In her sadness and her mirth,
Feeling her ripe influence stir
Brought the violets to birth.

The great golden clouds of even,
They, too, knew her, and the host
Of the eternal stars in heaven;
And I deemed I knew her most.
I, to whom the Word was given
How archangels have been lost!

Given in vain! . . . But all is over!
Every spell that bound me broken!
In her eyes I can discover
Of that perisht soul no token.
I can neither hate nor love her.
All my loss must be unspoken.

Mourn I may, that from her features
All the angel light is gone.
But I chide not. Human creatures
Are not angels. She was none.
Women have so many natures!
I think she loved me well with one.

All is not with love departed.
Life remains, though toucht with scorn.
Lonely, but not broken-hearted.
Nature changes not. The morn
Breathes not sadder. Buds have started
To white clusters on the thorn.

And to-morrow I shall see
How the leaves their green silk sheath
Have burst upon the chestnut-tree.
And the white rose-bush beneath
My lattice which, once tending, she
Made thrice sweeter with her breath,

Its black buds through moss and glue
Will swell greener. And at eve
Winking bats will waver through
The gray warmth from eave to eave,
While the daisy gathers dew.
These things grieve not, though I grieve.

What of that? Deep Nature's gladness
Does not help this grief to less.
And the stars will show no sadness,
And the flowers no heaviness,
Though each thought should turn to madness
'Neath the strain of its distress!

No, if life seem lone to me,
'T is scarce lonelier than at first.
Lonely natures there must be.
Eagles are so. I was nurst
Far from love in infancy:
I have sought to slake my thirst

At high founts; to fly alone,
Haunt the heaven, and soar, and sing.
Earth's warm joys I have not known.
This one heart held everything.
Now my eyrie is o'erthrown!
As of old, I spread the wing,

And rise up to meet my fate
With a yet unbroken will.
When Heaven shut up Eden-gate,
Man was given the earth to till.
There 's a world to cultivate,
And a solitude to fill.

Welcome man's old helpmate, Toil!
How may this heart's hurt be healed?
Crush the olive into oil;
Turn the ploughshare; sow the field
All are tillers of the soil.
Each some harvest hopes to yield.

Shall I perish with the whole
Of the coming years in view
Unattempted? To the soul
Every hour brings something new.
Still suns rise: still ages roll.
Still some deed is left to do.

Some . . . but what? Small matter now!
For one lily for her hair,
For one rose to wreathe her brow,
For one gem to sparkle there,
I had . . . words, old words, I know!
What was I, that she should care

How I differed from the common
Crowd that thrills not to her touch?
How I deemed her more than human,
And had died to crown her such?
They? To them she is mere woman.
O, her loss and mine is much!

Fool, she haunts me still! No wonder!
Not a bud on yon black bed,
Not a swatéd lily yonder,
But recalls some fragrance fled!
Here, what marvel I should ponder
On the last word which she said?

I must seek some other place
Where free Nature knows her not:
Where I shall not meet her face
In each old familiar spot.
There is comfort left in space.
Even this grief may be forgot.

Great men reach dead hands unto me
From the graves to comfort me.
Shakspeare's heart is throbbing through me.
All man has been man may be.
Plato speaks like one that knew me.
Life is made Philosophy.

Ah, no, no! while yet the leaf
Turns, the truth upon its pall.
By the stature of this grief,
Even Shakespeare shows so small!
Plato palters with relief.
Grief is greater than them all!

They were pedants who could speak.
Grander souls have past unheard:
Such as found all language weak;
Choosing rather to record
Secrets before Heaven: nor break
Faith with angels by a word.

And Heaven heeds this wretchedness
Which I suffer. Let it be.
Would that I could love thee less!
I, too, am dragged down by thee.
Thine — in weakness — thine — ah yes
Yet farewell eternally.

Child, I have no lips to chide thee.
Take the blessing of a heart
(Never more to beat beside thee!)
Which in blessing breaks. Depart.
Farewell. I that deified thee
Dare not question what thou art.

THE ARTIST.

O Artist, range not over-wide:
Lest what thou seek be haply hid
In bramble-blossoms at thy side,
Or shut within the daisy-lid.

God's glory lies not out of reach.
The moss we crush beneath our feet,
The pebbles on the wet sea-beach,
Have solemn meanings strange and sweet.

The peasant at his cottage door
May teach thee more than Plato knew:
See that thou scorn him not: adore
God in him, and thy nature too.

Know well thy friends. The woodbine's breath,
The woolly tendril on the vine,
Are more to thee than Cato's death,
Or Cicero's words to Catiline.

The wild rose is thy next in blood:
Share Nature with her, and thy heart.
The kingcups are thy sisterhood:
Consult them duly on thine art.

Nor cross the sea for gems. Nor seek:
Be sought. Fear not to dwell alone.
Possess thyself. Be proudly meek.
See thou be worthy to be known.

The Genius on thy daily ways
Shall meet, and take thee by the hand:
But serve him not as who obeys:
He is thy slave if thou command:

And blossoms on the blackberry-stalks
He shall enchant as thou dost pass,
Till they drop gold upon thy walks,
And diamonds in the dewy grass.

Such largess of the liberal bowers
From left to right is grandly flung,
What time their subject blooms and flowers
King-Poets walk in state among.

Be quiet. Take things as they come;
Each hour will draw out some surprise.
With blessing let the days go home:
Thou shalt have thanks from evening skies.

Lean not on one mind constantly:
Lest, where one stood before, two fall.
Something God hath to say to thee
Worth hearing from the lips of all.

All things are thine estate: yet must
Thou first display the title-deeds,
And sue the world. Be strong: and trust
High instincts more than all the creeds.

The world of Thought is packed so tight,
If thou stand up another tumbles:
Heed it not, though thou have to fight
With giants; whoso follows stumbles.

Assert thyself: and by and by
The world will come and lean on thee.
But seek not praise of men: thereby
Shall false shows cheat thee. Boldly be.

Each man was worthy at the first:
God spake to us ere we were born:
But we forget. The land is curst:
We plant the brier, reap the thorn.

Remember, every man He made
Is different: has some deed to do,
Some work to work. Be undismayed,
Though thine be humble: do it too.

Not all the wisdom of the schools
Is wise for thee. Hast thou to speak?
No man hath spoken for thee. Rules
Are well: but never fear to break

The scaffolding of other souls:
It was not meant for thee to mount;
Though it may serve thee. Separate wholes
Make up the sum of God's account.

Earth's number-scale is near us set;
The total God alone can see;
But each some fraction: shall I fret
If you see Four where I saw Three?

A unit's loss the sum would mar;
Therefore if I have One or Two,
I am as rich as others are,
And help the whole as well as you.

This wild white rosebud in my hand
Hath meanings meant for me alone,
Which no one else can understand:
To you it breathes with altered tone:

How shall I class its properties
For you? or its wise whisperings
Interpret? Other ears and eyes
It teaches many other things.

We number daisies, fringe and star:
We count the cinqfoils and the poppies:
We know not what they mean. We are
Degenerate copyists of copies.

We go to Nature, not as lords,
But servants: and she treats us thus:
Speaks to us with indifferent words,
And from a distance looks at us.

Let us go boldly, as we ought,
And say to her, "We are a part
Of that supreme original Thought
Which did conceive thee what thou art:

"We will not have this lofty look:
Thou shalt fall down, and recognize
Thy kings: we will write in thy book,
Command thee with our eyes."

She hath usurpt us. She should be
Our model; but we have become
Her miniature-painters. So when we
Entreat her softly she is dumb.

Nor serve the subject overmuch:
Nor rhythm and rhyme, nor color and form.
Know Truth hath all great graces, such
As shall with these thy work inform.

We ransack History's tattered page:
We prate of epoch and costume:
Call this, and that, the Classic Age:
Choose tunic now, now helm and plume:

But while we halt in weak debate
'Twixt that and this appropriate theme,
The offended wild-flowers stare and wait,
The bird hoots at us from the stream.

Next, as to laws. What 's beautiful
We recognize in form and face:
And judge it thus, and thus, by rule,
As perfect law brings perfect grace:

If through the effect we drag the cause,
Dissect, divide, anatomize,
Results are lost in loathsome laws,
And all the ancient beauty dies:

Till we, instead of bloom and light,
See only sinews, nerves, and veins:
Nor will the effect and cause unite,
For one is lost if one remains:

But from some higher point behold
This dense, perplexing complication;
And laws involved in laws unfold.
And orb into thy contemplation.

God, when he made the seed, conceived
The flower; and all the work of sun
And rain, before the stem was leaved,
In that prenatal thought was done;

The girl who twines in her soft hair
The orange-flower, with love's devotion,
By the mere act of being fair
Sets countless laws of life in motion;

So thou, by one thought thoroughly great,
Shalt, without heed thereto, fulfil
All laws of art. Create! create!
Dissection leaves the dead dead still.

All Sciences are branches, each,
Of that first science,— Wisdom. Seize
The true point whence, if thou shouldst reach
Thine arm out, thou may'st grasp all these,

And close all knowledge in thy palm.
As History proves Philosophy:
Philosophy, with warnings calm,
Prophet-like, guiding History.

Burn catalogues. Write thine own books.
What need to pore o'er Greece and Rome?

When whoso through his own life looks
Shall find that he is fully come,

Through Greece and Rome, and Middle-Age:
Hath been by turns, ere yet full-grown,
Soldier, and Senator, and Sage,
And worn the tunic and the gown.

Cut the world thoroughly to the heart.
The sweet and bitter kernel crack.
Have no half-dealings with thine art.
All heaven is waiting: turn not back.

If all the world for thee and me
One solitary shape possessed,
What shall I say? a single tree —
Whereby to type and hint the rest,

And I could imitate the bark
And foliage, both in form and hue,
Or silvery-gray, or brown and dark,
Or rough with moss, or wet with dew,

But thou, with one form in thine eye,
Couldst penetrate all forms: possess
The soul of form: and multiply
A million like it, more or less, —

Which were the Artist of us twain?
The moral 's clear to understand.
Where'er we walk, by hill or plain,
Is there no mystery on the land?

The osiered, oozy water, ruffled
By fluttering swifts that dip and wink:
Deep cattle in the cowslips muffled,
Or lazy-eyed upon the brink:

Or, when — a scroll of stars — the night
(By God withdrawn) is rolled away,
The silent sun, on some cold height,
Breaking the great seal of the day:

Are these not words more rich than ours?
O seize their import if you can!
Our souls are parched like withering flowers,
Our knowledge ends where it began.

While yet about us fall God's dews,
And whisper secrets o'er the earth
Worth all the weary years we lose
In learning legends of our birth,

Arise, O Artist! and restore
Their music to the moaning winds,
Love's broken pearls to life's bare shore,
And freshness to our fainting minds.

THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

I.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE FLIGHT.

Take the diamonds from my hair!
Take the flowers from the urn!
Fling the lattice wide! more air!
Air — more air, or else I burn!

Put the bracelets by. And thrust
Out of sight these hated pearls.
I could trample them to dust,
Though they *were* his gift, the Earl's!

Flusht I am? The dance it was.
Only that. Now leave me, Sweet.
Take the flowers, Love, because
They will wither in this heat.

Good night, dearest! Leave the door
Half-way open as you go.
— O, thank God? . . . Alone once more.
Am I dreaming? . . . Dreaming? . . .
no!

Still that music underneath
Works to madness in my brain.
Even the roses seem to breathe
Poisoned perfumes, full of pain.

Let me think . . . my head is aching.
I have little strength to think.
And I know my heart is breaking.
Yet, O love, I will not shrink!

In his look was such sweet sadness.
And he fixed that look on me.
I was helpless . . . call it madness,
Call it guilt . . . but it must be.

I can bear it, if, in losing
All things else, I lose him not.
All the grief is my own choosing.
Can I murmur at my lot?

Ah, the night is bright and still
Over all the fields I know.
And the chestnuts on the hill:
And the quiet lake below.

By that lake I yet remember
How, last year, we stood together
One wild eve in warm September
Bright with thunder: not a feather

Stirred the slumbrous swans that floated
Past the reed-beds, husht and white;
Towers of sultry cloud hung moated
In the lake's unshaken light:

Far behind us all the extensive
Woodland blackened against heaven:
And we spoke not: — pausing pensive:
Till the thunder-cloud was riven,

And the black wood whitened under,
And the storm began to roll,
And the love laid up like thunder
Burst at once upon my soul.

There! . . . the moon is just in crescent
In the silent happy sky.
And to-night the meanest peasant
In her light 's more blest than I.

Other moons I soon shall see
Over Asian headlands green:
Ocean-spaces sparkling free
Isles of breathless balm between.

And the rosy-rising star
At the setting of the day
From the distant sandy bar
Shining over Africa:

Steering through the glowing weather
Past the tracks of crimson light,
Down the sunset lost together
Far athwart the summer night.

"Canst thou make such life thy choice,
My heart's own, my chosen one?"
So he whispered and his voice
Had such magic in its tone!

But one hour ago we parted.
And we meet again to-morrow.
Parted — silent, and sad-hearted:
And we meet — in guilt and sorrow.

But we *shall* meet . . . meet, O God,
To part never . . . the last time!
Yes! the Ordeal shall be trod.
Burning ploughshares — love and crime.

O with him, with him to wander
Through the wide world — only his!
Heart and hope and heaven to squander
On the wild wealth of his kiss!

Then? . . . like these poor flowers that wither
In my bosom, to be thrown
Lightly from him any whither
When the sweetness all is flown?

O, I know it all, my fate!
But the gulf is crost forever.
And regret is born too late.
The shut Past reopens never.

Fear? . . . I cannot fear! for fear
Dies with hope in every breast.
O, I see the frozen sneer,
Careless smile, and callous jest!

But my shame shall yet be worn
Like the purple of a Queen.
I can answer scorn with scorn.
Fool! I know not what I mean.

Yet beneath his smile (*his* smile!)
Smiles less kind I shall not see.
Let the whole wide world revile.
He is all the world to me.

So to-night all hopes, all fears,
All the bright and brief array
Of my lost youth's happier years,
With these gems I put away.

Gone! . . . so . . . one by one . . . all gone!
Not one jewel I retain
Of my life's wealth. All alone
I tread boldly o'er my pain

On to him . . . Ah, me! my child —
My own fair-haired, darling boy!
In his sleep just now he smiled.
All his dreams are dreams of joy.

How those soft long lashes shade
That young cheek so husht and warm,
Like a half-blown rosebud laid
On the little dimpled arm!

He will wake without a mother.
He will hate me when he hears
From the cold lips of another
All my faults in after years.

None will tell the deep devotion
Wherewith I have brooded o'er
His young life, since its first motion
Made me hope and pray once more.

On my breast he smiled and slept,
Smiled between my wrongs and me,
Till the weak warm tears I wept
Set my dry, coiled nature free.

Nay, . . . my feverish kiss would wake him.
How can I dare bless his sleep?
They will change him soon, and make him
Like themselves that never weep;

Fitted to the world's bad part:
Yet, will all their wealth afford him
Aught more rich than this lost heart
Whose last anguish yearns toward him?

Ah, there 's none will love him then
As I love that leave him now!
He will mix with selfish men.
Yes, he has his father's brow!

Lie thou there, thou poor rose-blossom,
In that little hand more light
Than upon this restless bosom,
Whose last gift is given to-night.

God forgive me! — My God, cherish
His lone motherless infancy!
Would to-night that I might perish!
But heaven will not let me die.

O love! love! but this is bitter!
O that we had never met!
O but hate than love were fitter!
And he too may hate me yet.

Yet to him have I not given
All life's sweetness? . . . fame? and name?
Hope? and happiness? and heaven?
Can he hate me for my shame?

"Child," he said, "thy life was glad
In the dawning of its years;
And love's morn should be less sad,
For his eve may close in tears.

"Sweet in novel lands," he said,
"Day by day to share delight;
On by soft surprises led,
And together rest at night.

"We will see the shores of Greece,
And the temples of the Nile:

Sail where summer suns increase
  Toward the south from isle to isle.

"Track the first star that swims on
  Glowing depths toward night and us,
While the heats of sunset crimson
  All the purple Bosphorus.

"Leaning o'er some dark ship-side,
  Watch the wane of mighty moons;
Or through starlit Venice glide,
  Singing down the blue lagoons.

"So from coast to coast we 'll range,
  Growing nearer as we move
On our charmed way; each soft change
  Only deepening changeless love."

'T was the dream which I, too, dreamed
  Once, long since, in days of yore.
Life's long-faded fancies seemed
  At his words to bloom once more.

The old hope, the wreckt belief,
  The lost light of vanisht years,
Ere my heart was worn with grief,
  Or my eyes were dimmed with tears!

When, a careless girl, I clung
  With proud trust to my own powers;
Ah, long since I, too, was young,
  I, too, dreamed of happier hours!

Whether this may yet be so
  (Truth or dream) I cannot tell.
But where'er his footsteps go
  Turns my heart, I feel too well.

Ha! the long night wears away.
  Yon cold drowsy star grows dim.
The long-feared, long-wisht-for day
  Comes, when I shall fly with him.

In the laurel wakes the thrush.
  Through these dreaming chambers wide
Not a sound is stirring. Hush;
  — O, it was my child that cried!

II.

THE PORTRAIT.

Yes, 't is she! Those eyes! that hair
  With the self-same wondrous hue!
And that smile — which was so fair,
  Is it strange I deemed it true?

Years, years, years I have not drawn
  Back this curtain! there she stands
By the terrace on the lawn,
  With the white rose in her hands:

And about her the armorial
  Scutcheons of a haughty race,
Graven each with its memorial
  Of the old Lords of the Place.

You, who do profess to see
  In the face the written mind,
Look in that face, and tell me
  In what part of it you find

All the falsehood, and the wrong,
  And the sin, which must have been
Hid in baleful beauty long,
  Like the worm that lurks unseen

In the shut heart of the flower.
  'T is the Sex, no doubt! And still
Some may lack the means, the power,
  There 's not one that lacks the will.

Their own way they seek the Devil,
  Ever prone to the deceiver!
If too deep I feel this evil
  And this shame, may God forgive her!

For I loved her, — loved, ay, loved her
  As a man just once may love.
I so trusted, so approved her,
  Set her, blindly, so above

This poor world which was about her!
  And (so loving her) because,
With a faith too high to doubt her,
  I, forsooth, but seldom was

At her feet with clamorous praises
  And protested tenderness
(These things some men can do), phrases
  On her face, perhaps her dress,

Or the flower she chose to braid
  In her hair, — because, you see,
Thinking love 's best proved unsaid,
  And by words the dignity

Of true feeling 's often lost,
  I was vowed to life's broad duty;
Man's great business uppermost
  In my mind, not woman's beauty;

Toiling still to win for her
  Honor, fortune, state in life.

("Too much with the Minister,
And too little with the wife!")

Just for this, she flung aside
All my toil, my heart, my name;
Trampled on my ancient pride,
Turned my honor into shame.

O, if this old coronet
Weighed too hard on her young brow,
Need she thus dishonor it,
Fling it in the dust so low?

But 't is just these women's way,—
All the same the wide world over!
Fooled by what 's most worthless, they
Cheat in turn the honest lover.

And I was not, I thank heaven,
Made, as some, to read them through;
Were life three times longer even,
There are better things to do.

No! to let a woman lie
Like a canker, at the roots
Of a man's life, — burn it dry,
Nip the blossom, stunt the fruits,

This I count both shame and thrall!
Who is free to let one creature
Come between himself, and all
The true process of his nature,

While across the world the nations
Call to us that we should share
In their griefs, their exultations?—
All they will be, all they are!

And so much yet to be done, —
Wrong to root out, good to strengthen!
Such hard battles to be won!
Such long glories yet to lengthen!

'Mid all these, how small one grief, —
One wrecked heart, whose hopes are o'er!
For myself I scorn relief.
For the people I claim more.

Strange! these crowds whose instincts guide them
Fail to get the thing they would,
Till we nobles stand beside them,
Give our names, or shed our blood.

From of old this hath been so.
For we too were with the first
In the fight fought long ago
When the chain of Charles was burst.

Who but we set Freedom's border
Wrenched at Runnymede from John?
Who but we stand, towers of order,
'Twixt the red cap and the Throne?

And they wrong us, England's Peers,
Us, the vanguard of the land,
Who should say the march of years
Makes us shrink at Truth's right hand.

'Mid the armies of Reform,
To the People's cause allied,
We — the forces of the storm!
We — the planets of the tide!

Do I seem too much to fret
At my own peculiar woe?
Would to heaven I could forget
How I loved her long ago!

As a father loves a child,
So I loved her: — rather thus
Than as youth loves, when our wild
New-found passions master us.

And — for I was proud of old
('T is my nature) — doubtless she
In the man so calm, so cold,
All the heart's warmth could not see.

Nay, I blame myself — nor lightly,
Whose chief duty was to guide
Her young careless life more rightly
Through the perils at her side.

Ah, but love is blind! and I
Loved her blindly, blindly! . . . Well,
Who that 'ere loved trustfully
Such strange danger could foretell?

As some consecrated cup
On its saintly shrine secure,
All my life seemed lifted up
On that heart I deemed so pure.

Well, for me there yet remains
Labor — that 's much: then, the state:
And, what pays a thousand pains,
Sense of right and scorn of fate.

And, O, more! . . . my own brave boy,
With his frank and eager brow,

Had his hearty innocent joy.
For as yet he does not know

All the wrong his mother did.
Would that this might pass unknown!
For his young years God forbid
I should darken by my own.

Yet this must come . . . But I mean
He shall be, as time moves on,
All his mother might have been,
Comfort, counsel — both in one.

Doubtless, first, in that which moved me
Man's strong natural wrath had part.
Wronged by one I deemed had loved me,
For I loved her from my heart!

But that 's past! If I was sore
To the heart, and blind with shame,
I see calmly now. Nay, more, —
For I pity where I blame.

For, if he betray or grieve her,
What is hers to turn to still?
And at last, when he shall leave her,
As at last he surely will,

Where shall she find refuge? what
That worst widowhood can soothe?
For the Past consoles her not,
Nor the memories of her youth,

Neither that which in the dust
She hath flung, — the name she bore;
But with her own shame she must
Dwell forsaken evermore.

Nothing left but years of anguish,
And remorse but not return:
Of her own self-hate to languish:
For her long-lost peace to yearn:

Or, yet worse beyond all measure,
Starting from wild reveries,
Drain the poison misnamed Pleasure,
And laugh drunken on the lees.

O false heart! O woman, woman,
Woman! would thy treachery
Had been less! For surely no man
Better loved than I loved thee.

We must never meet again.
Even shouldst thou repent the past.
Both must suffer: both feel pain:
Ere God pardon both at last.

Farewell, thou false face! Life speeds me
On its duties. I must fight:
I must toil. The People needs me:
And I speak for them to-night.

III.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

THANKS, Dear! Put the lamp down . . . so,
For my eyes are weak and dim.
How the shadows come and go!
Speak truth, — have they sent for him?

Yes, thank Heaven! And he will come,
Come and watch my dying hour, —
Though I left and shamed his home.
— I am withered like this flower

Which he gave me long ago.
'T was upon my bridal eve,
When I swore to love him so
As a wife should — smile or grieve

With him, for him, — and not shrink.
And now? . . . O the long, long pain!
See this sunken cheek! You think
He would know my face again?

All its wretched beauty gone!
Only the deep care survives.
Ah, could years of grief atone
For those fatal hours! . . . It drives

Past the pane, the bitter blast!
In this garret one might freeze.
Hark there! wheels below! At last
He is come then? No . . . the trees

And the night-wind — nothing more!
Set the chair for him to sit,
When he comes. And close the door,
For the gust blows cold through it.

When I think, I can remember
I was born in castle halls, —
How yon dull and dying ember
Glares against the whitewasht walls!

If he come not (but you said
That the messenger was sent
Long since?) Tell him when I 'm dead
How my life's last hours were spent

In repenting that life's sin,
And . . . the room grows strangely dark!
See, the rain is oozing in.
Set the lamp down nearer. Hark,

Footsteps, footsteps on the stairs!
His . . . no, no! 't was *not* the wind.
God, I know, has heard my prayers.
We shall meet. I am resigned.

Prop me up upon the pillows.
Will he come to my bedside?
Once 't was his . . . Among the willows
How the water seems to glide!

Past the woods, the farms, the towers,
It seems gliding, gliding through.
"*Dearest, see, these young June-flowers,*
I have pluckt them all for you,

"*Here, where passed my boyhood musing*
On the bride which I might wed."
Ah, it goes now! I am losing
All things. What was that he said?

Say, where am I? . . . this strange room?

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Ah, his voice! I knew it.
But this place? . . . Is this the tomb,
With the cold dews creeping through it?

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Will you stand
Near me? Sit down. Do not stir.
Tell me, may I take your hand?
Tell me, will you look on her

Who so wronged you? I have wept
O such tears for that sin's sake!
And that thought has never slept, —
But it lies here, like a snake,

In my bosom, — gnawing, gnawing
All my life up! I had meant,
Could I live yet . . . Death is drawing
Near me —

THE EARL.

God, thy punishment!

Dare I judge her? —

GERTRUDE.

O, believe me,
'T was a dream, a hideous dream.
And I wake now. Do not leave me.
I am dying. All things seem

Failing from me — even my breath!
But my sentence is from old.
Sin came first upon me. Death
Follows sin, soon, soon! Behold,

Dying thus! Ah, why didst leave
Lonely Love's lost bridal bowers
Where I found the snake, like Eve,
Unsuspected 'mid the flowers?

Had I been some poor man's bride,
I had shared with love his lot:
Labored truly by his side,
And made glad his lowly cot.

I had been content to mate
Love with labor's sunburnt brows.
But to be a thing of state, —
Homeless in a husband's house!

In the gorgeous game — the strife
For the dazzling prize — that moved you —
Love seemed crowded out of life —

THE EARL.

Ah fool! and I loved you, loved you!

GERTRUDE.

Yes. I see it all at last —
All in ruins. I can dare
To gaze down o'er my lost past
From these heights of my despair.

O, when all seemed grown most drear —
I was weak — I cannot tell —
But the serpent in my ear
Whispered, whispered — and I fell.

Look around, now. Does it cheer you,
This strange place? the wasted frame
Of the dying woman near you,
Weighed into her grave by shame?

Can you trace in this wan form
Aught resembling that young girl's
Whom you loved once? See, this arm —
Shrunken, shrunken! And my curls,

They have cut them all away.
And my brows are worn with woe.
Would you, looking at me, say,
She was lovely long ago?

Husband, answer! in all these
Are you not avenged? If I
Could rise now, upon my knees,
At your feet, before I die,

I would fall down in my sorrow
And my shame, and say "forgive,"
That which will be dust to-morrow,
This weak clay!

THE EARL.

Poor sufferer, live.

God forgives. Shall I not so?

GERTRUDE.

Nay, a better life, in truth,
I do hope for. Not below.
Partner of my perisht youth,

Husband, wronged one! Let your blessing
Be with me, before, to-night,
From the life that's past redressing
This strayed soul must take its flight!

Tears, warm tears! I feel them creep
Down my cheek. Tears — not my own.
It is long since I could weep.
Past all tears my grief hath grown.

Over this dry withered cheek,
Drop by drop, I feel them fall.
But my voice is growing weak:
And I have not spoken all.

I had much to say. My son,
My lost child that never knew me!
Is he like me? One by one,
All his little ways come to me.

Is he grown? I fancy him!
How that childish face comes back
O'er my memory sweet and dim!
And his long hair? Is it black?

Or as mine was once? His mother
Did he ever ask to see?
Has he grown to love another —
Some strange woman not like me?

Would he shudder to behold
This pale face and faded form
If he knew, in days of old,
How he slumbered on my arm?

How I nurst him? loved him? missed him
All this long heartbroken time?
It is years since last I kissed him.
Does he hate me for my crime?

I had meant to send some token —
If, indeed, I dared to send it.
This old chain — the links are broken —
Like my life — I could not mend it.

Husband, husband! I am dying,
Dying! Let me feel your kiss
On my brow where I am lying.
You are great enough for this!

And you'll lay me, when I'm gone,
— Not in those old sculptured walls!
Let no name be carved — no stone —
No ancestral funerals!

In some little grave of grass
Anywhere, you'll let me lie:
Where the night-winds only pass,
Or the clouds go floating by;

Where my shame may be forgot;
And the story of my life
And my sin remembered not.
So forget the faithless wife;

Or if, haply, when I'm dead,
On some worthier happier breast
Than mine was, you lean your head,
Should one thought of me molest

Those calm hours, recall me only
As you see me, — worn with tears:
Dying desolate here; left lonely
By the overthrow of years.

May I lay my arm, then, there?
Does it not seem strange to you,
This old hand among your hair?
And these wasted fingers too?

How the lamp wanes! All grows dark —
Dark and strange. Yet now there shined
Something past me . . . Husband, hark!
There are voices on the wind.

Are they come? and do they ask me
For the songs we used to sing?
Strange that memory thus should task me!
Listen —
Birds are on the wing:

And thy Birthday Morn is rising.
May it ever rise as bright!
Wake not yet! The day's devising
Fair new things for thy delight.

Wake not yet! Last night this flower
Near thy porch began to pout
From its warm sheath: in an hour
All the young leaves will be out.

Wake not yet! So dear thou art, love,
That I grudge these buds the bliss
Each will bring to thy young heart, love,
I would claim all for my kiss.

Wake not yet!
— There now, it fails me!
Is my lord there? I am ill.
And I cannot tell what ails me.
Husband! Is he near me still?

O, this anguish seems to crush
All my life up, — body and mind!

THE EARL.

Gertrude! Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Hush!
There are voices in the wind.

THE EARL.

Still she wanders! Ah, the plucking
At the sheet!

GERTRUDE.

Hist! do not take it
From my bosom. See, 't is sucking!
If it sleep we must not wake it.
Such a little rosy mouth!
— Not to-night, O not to-night!
Did he tell me in the South
That those stars were twice as bright?

Off! away! unhand me — go!
I forgive thee my lost heaven,
And the wrong which thou didst do.
Would my sin, too, were forgiven!

Gone at last! . . . Ah, fancy feigns
These wild visions! I grow weak.
Fast, fast dying! Life's warmth wanes
From me. Is the fire out?

THE EARL.

Speak,

Gertrude, speak! My wife, my wife!
Nay she is not dead, — not dead!
See, the lips move. There is life.
She is choking. Lift her head.

GERTRUDE.

* * * * *

Death! . . . My eyes grow dim, and dimmer.
I can scarcely see thy face.
But the twilight seems to glimmer,
Lighted from some distant place.

Husband!

THE EARL.

Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.

Art thou near me?
On thy breast — once more — thy breast!
I have sinned — and — nay, yet hear me,
And repented — and —

THE EARL.

The rest

God hath heard, where now thou art,
Thou poor soul, — in Heaven.
The door —
Close it softly, and depart.
Leave us!
She is mine once more.

MINOR POEMS.

THE PARTING OF LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE.

A FRAGMENT.

Now, as the time wore by to Our Lady's Day,
Spring lingered in the chambers of the South.
The nightingales were far in fairy lands
Beyond the sunset: but the wet blue woods
Were half aware of violets in the wake
Of morning rains. The swallow still delayed
To build and be about in noisy roofs,
And March was moaning in the windy elm.

But Arthur's royal purpose held to keep
A joust of arms to solemnize the time
In stately Camelot. So the King sent forth
His heralds, and let cry through all the land
That he himself would take the lists, and tilt
Against all comers.
Hither came the chiefs
Of Christendom. The King of Northgalies;
Anguishe, the King of Ireland; the Haut Prince,
Sir Galahault; the King o' the Hundred Knights;
The Kings of Scotland and of Brittany;
And many more renownéd knights whereof
The names are glorious. Also all the earls,
And all the dukes, and all the mighty men
And famous heroes of the Table Round,
From far Northumberland to where the wave
Rides rough on Devon from the outer main.

So that there was not seen for seven years,
Since when, at Whitsuntide, Sir Galahad
Departed out of Carlyel from the court,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights.

Then would King Arthur that the Queen should ride
With him from Carlyel to Camelot
To see the jousts. But she, because that yet
The sickness was upon her, answered nay.
Then said King Arthur, "This repenteth me.
For never hath been seen for seven years,
No, not since Galahad, at Whitsuntide,
Departed from us out of Carlyel,
So fair a fellowship of goodly knights."
But the Queen would not, and the King in wrath
Brake up the court, and rode to Astolat
On this side Camelot.
Now men said the Queen
Tarried behind because of Launcelot,
For Launcelot stayed to heal him of his wound.
And there had been estrangement 'twixt these two
I' the later time, because of bitter words.
So when the King with all his fellowship
Was ridden out of Carlyel, the Queen
Arose, and called to her Sir Launcelot.

Then to Sir Launcelot spoke Queen Guenevere.

"Not for the memory of that love whereof
No more than memory lives, but, Sir, for that
Which even when love is ended yet endures
Making immortal life with deathless deeds,
Honor — true knighthood's golden spurs, the crown

And priceless diadem of peerless Queens,—
I make appeal to you, that hear perchance
The last appeal which I shall ever make.
So weigh my words not lightly! for I feel
The fluttering fires of life grow faint and cold
About my heart. And oft, indeed, to me
Lying whole hours awake in the dead nights
The end seems near, as though the darkness knew
The angel waiting there to call my soul
Perchance before the house awakes; and oft
When faint, and all at once, from far away,
The mournful midnight bells begin to sound
Across the river, all the days that were
(Brief, evil days!) return upon my heart,
And, where the sweetness seemed, I see the sin.
For, waking lone, long hours before the dawn,
Beyond the borders of the dark I seem
To see the twilight of another world,
That grows and grows and glimmers on my gaze.
And oft, when late, before the languorous moon
Through yonder windows to the West goes down
Among the pines, deep peace upon me falls,
Deep peace like death, so that I think I know
The blesséd Mary and the righteous saints
Stand at the throne, and intercede for me.
Wherefore these things are thus I cannot tell.
But now I pray you of your fealty,
And by all knightly faith which may be left,
Arise and get you hence, and join the King.
For wherefore hold you thus behind the court,
Seeing my liege the King is moved in wrath?
For wete you well what say your foes and mine.
'See how Sir Launcelot and Queen Guenevere
Do hold them ever thus behind the King
That they may take their pleasure!' Knowing not
How that for me all these delights are come
To be as withered violets."
Half in tears
She ceased abrupt. Given up to a proud grief,
Vexed to be vext. With love and anger moved.
Love toucht with scorn, and anger pierced with love.
About her, all unheeded, her long hair
Loosed its warm, yellow, waving loveliness,
And o'er her bare and shining shoulder cold
Fell floating free. Upon one full white arm,
To which the amorous purple coverlet
Clung dimpling close, her drooping state was propt.
There, half in shadow of her soft gold curls,
She leaned, and like a rose enricht with dew,
Whose heart is heavy with the clinging bee,
Bowed down toward him all her glowing face,
While in the light of her large angry eyes
Uprose, and rose, a slow imperious sorrow,
And o'er the shine of still, unquivering tears
Swam on to him.

But he, with brows averse
And orgolous looks, three times to speech addressed,
Three times in vain. The silence of the place
Fell like a hand upon his heart, and hushed
His foolish anger with authority.
He would not see the wretched Queen: he saw
Only the hunter on the arrassed wall
Prepare to wind amort his bugle horn,
And the long daylight dying down the floors;
For half-way through the golden gates of eve
The sun was rolled. The dropping tapestry glowed
With awful hues. Far off among his reeds

The river, smitten with a waning light,
Shone; and, behind black lengths of pine revealed,
The red West smouldered, and the day declined.
Then year by year, as wave on wave a sea,
The tided Past came softly o'er his heart,
And all the days which had been.

So he stood
Long in his mind divided: with himself
At strife: and, like a steed that hotly chafes
His silver bit, which yet some silken rein
Swayed by a skilled accustomed hand restrains,
His heart against the knowledge of its love
Made vain revolt, and fretful rose and sunk.
But at the last, quelling a wayward grief,
That swelled against all utterance, and sought
To force its salt and sorrowful overflow
Upon weak language, "Now indeed," he cried,
"I see the face of the old time is changed,
And all things altered! Will the sun still burn?
Still burn the eternal stars? For love was deemed
Not less secure than these. Needs should there be
Something remarkable to prove the world
I am no more that Launcelot, nor thou
That Guenevere, of whom, long since, the fame,
Fruitful of noble deeds, with such a light
Did fill this nook and cantle of the earth,
That all great lands of Christendom beside
Showed darkened of their glory. But I see
That there is nothing left for men to swear by.
For then thy will did never urge me hence,
But drew me through all dangers to thy feet.
And none can say, least thou, I have not been
The staff and burgonet of thy fair fame.
Nor mind you, Madam, how in Surluse once,
When all the estates were met, and noble judges,
Armed clean with shields, set round to keep the right,
Before you sitting throned with Galahault
In great array, on fair green quilts of samite,
Rich, ancient, fringed with gold, seven summer days,
And all before the Earls of Northgalies,
Such service then with this old sword was wrought,
To crown thy beauty in the courts of Fame,
That in that time fell many noble knights,
And all men marvelled greatly? So when last
The loud horns blew to lodging, and we supped
With Palamedes and with Lamorak,
All those great dukes and kings, and famous queens,
Beholding us with a deep joy, avouched
Across the golden cups of costly wine
'There is no Queen of love but Guenevere,
And no true knight but Launcelot of the Lake!'"

Thus he, transported by the thought of days
And deeds that, like the mournful martial sounds
Blown through sad towns where some dead king goes by,
Made music in the chambers of his heart,
Swept by the mighty memory of the past.
Nor spake the sorrowful Queen, nor from deep muse
Unbent the grieving beauty of her brows,
But held her heart's proud pain superbly still.

But when he lifted up his looks, it seemed
Something of sadness in the ancient place,
Like dying breath from lips beloved of yore,
Or unforgotten touch of tender hands
After long years, upon his spirit fell.
For near the carven casement hung the bird,
With hood and jess, that oft had led them forth,

These lovers, through the heart of rippling woods
At morning, in the old and pleasant time.
And o'er the broidered canopies of state
Blazed Uther's dragons, curious, wrought with gems.
Then to his mind that dear and distant dawn
Came back, when first, a boy at Arthur's court,
He paused abasht before the youthful Queen.
And, feeling now her long imploring gaze
Holding him in its sorrow, when he marked
How changed her state, and all unlike to her,
The most renownéd beauty of the time,
And pearl of chivalry, for whom himself
All on a summer's day broke, long of yore
A hundred lances in the field, he sprang
And caught her hand, and, falling to one knee,
Arched all his haughty neck to a quick kiss.
And there was silence. Silently the West
Grew red and redder, and the day declined.

As o'er the hungering heart of some deep sea,
That swells against the planets and the moon
With sad continual strife and vain unrest,
In silence rise and roll the laboring clouds
That bind the thunder, o'er the heaving heart
Of Guenevere all sorrows fraught with love,
All stormy sorrows, in that silence passed.
And like a star in that tumultuous night
Love waxed and waned, and came and went, changed hue,
And was and was not: till the cloud came down,
And all her soul dissolved in showers: and love
Rose through the broken storm: and, with a cry
Of passion sheathed in sharpest pain, she stretched
Wide her warm arms: she rose, she reeled, and fell
(All her great heart unqueened) upon the breast
Of Launcelot; and, lifting up her voice,
She wept aloud, "Unhappy that I am,"
She wept, "Unhappy! Would that I had died
Long since, long ere I loved thee, Launcelot!
Would I had died long since! ere I had known
This pain, which hath become my punishment,
To have thirsted for the sea: to have received
A drop no bigger than a drop of dew!
I have done ill," she wept, "I am forlorn,
Forlorn! I falter where I stood secure:
The tower I built is fall'n, is fall'n: the staff
I leaned upon hath broken in my hand.
And I, disrobed, dethroned, discrowned, and all undone,
Survive my kingdom, widowed of all rule,
And men shall mock me for a foolish Queen.
For now I see thy love for me is dead,
Dead that brief love which was the light of life,
And all is dark: and I have lived too long.
For how henceforth, unhappy, shall I bear
To dwell among these halls where we have been?
How keep these chambers emptied of thy voice?
The walks where we have lingered long ago,
The gardens and the places of our love,
Which shall recall the days that come no more,
And all the joy which has been?"
Thus o'erthrown,
And on the breast of Launcelot weeping wild —
Weeping and murmuring — hung Queen Guenevere.
But, while she wept, upon her brows and lips
Warm kisses fell, warm kisses wet with tears.
For all his mind was melted with remorse,
And all his scorn was killed, and all his heart
Gave way in that caress, and all the love

Of happier years rolled down upon his soul
Redoubled; and he bowed his head, and cried,

"Though thou be variable as the waves,
More sharp than winds among the Hebrides
That shut the frozen Spring in stormy clouds,
As wayward as a child, and all unjust,
Yet must I love thee in despite of pain,
Thou peerless Queen of perfect love! Thou star
That draw'st all tides! Thou goddess far above
My heart's weak worship! so adored thou art,
And I so irretrievably all thine!
But now I will arise, as thou hast said,
And join the King: and these thine enemies
Shall know thee not defenceless any more.
For, either, living, I yet hold my life
To arm for thine, or, dying, by my death
Will steep love's injured honor in such blood
Shall wash out every stain! And so farewell,
Beloved. Forget me not when I am far,
But in thy prayers and in thine evening thoughts
Remember me: as I, when sundown crowns
The distant hills, and Ave-Mary rings,
Shall pine for thee on ways where thou art not."

So these two lovers in one long embrace,
An agony of reconcilement, hung
Blinded in tears and kisses, lip to lip,
And tranced from past and future, time and space.

But by this time, the beam of the slope day,
Edging blue mountain glooms with sullen gold,
A dying fire, fell mournfully athwart
The purple chambers. In the courts below
The shadow of the keep from wall to wall
Shook his dark skirt: great chimes began to sound,
And swing, and rock in glimmering heights, and roll
A reeling music down: but ere it fell
Faint bells in misty spires adown the vale
Caught it, and bore it floating on to night.

So from that long love-trance the envious time
Reclaimed them. Then with a great pang he rose
Like one that plucked his heart out from his breast,
And, bitterly unwinding her white arms
From the warm circle of their amorous fold,
Left living on her lips the lingering heat
Of one long kiss: and, gathering strongly back
His poured-out anguish to his soul, he went.

And the sun set.

Long while she sat alone,
Searching the silence with her fixéd eyes,
While far and farther off o'er distant floors
The intervals of brazen echoes fell.
A changeful light, from varying passions caught,
Flushed all her stately cheek from white to red
In doubtful alternation, as some star
Changes his fiery beauty: for her blood
Set headlong to all wayward moods of sense,
Stirred with swift ebb and flow: till suddenly all
The frozen heights of grief fell loosed, fast, fast,
In cataract over cataract, on her soul.
Then at the last she rose, a reeling shape
That like a shadow swayed against the wall,
Her slight hand held upon her bosom, and fell
Before the Virgin Mother on her knees.
There, in a halo of the silver shrine,
That touched and turned to starlight her slow tears,
Below the feet of the pale-pictured saint
She lay, poured out in prayer.

Meanwhile, without,
A sighing rain from a low fringe of cloud
Whispered among the melancholy hills.
The night's dark limits widened: far above
The crystal sky lay open: and the star

Of eve, his rosy circlet trembling clear,
Grew large and bright, and in the silver moats,
Between the accumulated terraces,
Tangled a trail of fire: and all was still.

A SUNSET FANCY.

Just at sunset, I would be
In some isle-garden, where the sea
I look into shall seem more blue
Than those dear and deep eyes do.
And, if anywhere the breeze
Shall have stirred the cypress-trees,
Straight the yellow light falls through,
Catching me, for once, at ease;
Just so much as may impinge
Some tall lily with a tinge
Of orange; while, above the wall,
Tumbles downward into view
(With a sort of small surprise)
One star more among them all,
For me to watch with half-shut eyes.

Or else upon the breezy deck
Of some felucca; and one speck
'Twixt the crimson and the yellow,
Which may be a little fleck
Of cloud, or gull with outstretcht neck,
To Spezia bound from Cape Circello;
With a sea-song in my ears
Of the bronzéd buccaneers:
While the night is waxing mellow,
And the helmsman slackly steers, —
Leaning, talking to his fellow,
Who has oaths for all he hears, —
Each thief swarthier than Othello.
Or, in fault of better things,
Close in sound of one who sings
To casements, in a southern city;
Tinkling upon tender strings
Some melodious old love-ditty;
While a laughing lady flings
One rose to him, just for pity.
But I have not any want
Sweeter than to be with you,
When the long light falleth slant,
And heaven turns a darker blue;
And a deeper smile grows through
The glance asleep 'neath those soft lashes,
Which the heart it steals into
First inspires and then abashes.
Just to hold your hand, — one touch
So light you scarce should feel it such!
Just to watch you leaning o'er
Those window-roses, love, . . . no more.

ASSOCIATIONS.

You know the place is just the same!
The rooks build here: the sandy hill is
Ablaze with broom, as when she came
Across the sea with her new name
To dwell among the moated lilies.

The trifoly is on the walls:
The daisies in the bowling-alley:
The ox at eve lows from the stalls:
At eve the cuckoo, floating, calls,
When foxgloves tremble in the valley.

The iris blows from court to court:
The bald white spider flits, or stays in
The chinks behind the dragonwort:
That Triton still, at his old sport,
Blows bubbles in his broken basin.

The terrace where she used to walk
Still shines at noon between the roses:
The garden paths are blind with chalk:
The dragon-fly from stalk to stalk
Swims sparkling blue till evening closes.

Then, just above that long dark copse,
One warm red star comes out, and passes
Westward, and mounts, and mounts, and stops
(Or seems to) o'er the turret-tops,
And lights those lonely casement-glasses.

Sir Ralph still wears that old grim smile.
The staircase creaks as up I clamber
To those still rooms, to muse awhile.
I see the little meadow-stile
As I lean from the great south-chamber.

And Lady Ruth is just as white.
(Ah, still, that face seems strangely like her!)
The lady and the wicked knight —
All just the same — she swooned for fright —
And he — his arm still raised to strike her.

Her boudoir — no one enters there:
The very flowers which last she gathered
Are in the vase; the lute — the chair —
And all things — just as then they were!
Except the jasmins, — those are withered.

"The breezy deck
Of some felucca." Page 374.

But when along the corridors
The last red pause of day is streaming,
I seem to hear her up the floors :
I seem to see her through the doors :
And then I know that I am dreaming.

MEETING AGAIN.

Yes ; I remember the white rose. And since then the young ivy has grown;
From your window we could not reach it, and now it is over the stone.
We did not part as we meet, Dear. Well, Time hath his own stern cures !
And Alice's eyes are deeper, and her hair has grown like yours.

Is our greeting all so strange then ? But there 's something here amiss,
When it is not well to speak kindly. And the olives are ripe by this.
I had not thought you so altered. But all is changed, God knows !
Good-night. It is night so soon now. Look there ! you have dropt your rose.

Nay, I have one that is withered and dearer to me. I came
To say good night, little Alice. She does not remember my name.
It is but the damp that is making my head and my heart ache so.
I never was strong in the old time, as the others were, you know.

And you 'll sleep well, will you not, Darling? The old words sound so dear!
'T is the last time I shall use them ; you need show neither anger nor fear.
It is well that you look so cheerful. And is time so smooth with you ?
How foolish I am ! Good night, Dear. And bid Alice good night too.

ARISTOCRACY.

To thee be all men heroes : every race
Noble : all women virgins : and each place
A temple : know thou nothing that is base.

THE MERMAIDEN.

He was a Prince with golden hair
(In a palace beside the sea),
And I but a poor Mermaiden, —
And how should he care for me ?

Last summer I came, in the long blue nights,
To sit in the cool sea-caves :
Last summer he came to count the stars
From his terrace above the waves.

There 's nothing so fair in the sea down there
As the light on his golden tresses :
There 's nothing so sweet as his voice : ah, nothing
So warm as the warmth of his kisses !

I could not help but love him, love him,
Till my love grew pain to me.
And to-morrow he weds the Princess
In that palace beside the sea.

AT HER CASEMENT.

I am knee-deep in grass, in this warm June night,
In the shade here, shut off from the great moonlight.
All alone, at her casement there,
She sits in the light, and she combs her hair.
She shakes it over the carven seat,
And combs it down to her stately feet.
And I watch her, hid in the blue June night,
Till my soul grows faint with the costly sight.
There 's no flaw on that fair fine brow of hers,
As fair and as proud as Lucifer's.
She looks in the glass as she turns her head :
She knows that the rose on her cheek is red :
She knows how her dark eyes shine, — their light
Would scarcely be dimmed though I died to-night.

I would that there in her chamber I stood,
Full-face to her terrible beauty : I would

I were laid on her queenly breast, at her lips,
With her warm hair wound through my finger-tips,
Draining her soul at one deep-drawn kiss.
And I would be humbly content for this
To die, as is due, before the morn,
Killed by her slowly returning scorn.

A FAREWELL.

Be happy, child. The last wild words are spoken.
To-morrow, mine no more, the world will claim thee.
I blame thee not. But all my life is broken.
Of that brief Past I have no single token.
Never in years to come my lips shall name thee,
Never, child, never!

I will not say "Forget me"; nor those hours
Which were so sweet. Some scent dead leaves retain.
Keep all the flowers I gave thee — all the flowers
Dead, dead! Though years on years of life were ours,
As we have met we shall not meet again;
Forever, child, forever!

AN EVENING IN TUSCANY.

Look! the sun sets. Now 's the rarest
Hour of all the blessed day.
(Just the hour, love, you look fairest!)
Even the snails are out to play.

Cool the breeze mounts, like this Chianti
Which I drain down to the sun.
—There! shut up that old green Dante,—
Turn the page, where we begun,

At the last news of Ulysses, —
A grand image, fit to close
Just such grand gold eves as this is,
Full of splendor and repose!

So loop up those long bright tresses, —
Only, one or two must fall
Down your warm neck Evening kisses
Through the soft curls spite of all.

Ah, but rest in your still place there!
Stir not — turn not! the warm pleasure
Coming, going in your face there,
And the rose (no richer treasure)

In your bosom, like my love there,
Just half secret and half seen;
And the soft light from above there
Streaming o'er you where you lean,

With your fair head in the shadow
Of that grass-hat's glancing brim,
Like a daisy in a meadow
Which its own deep fringes dim.

O you laugh, — you cry "What folly!"
Yet you 'd scarcely have me wise,
If I judge right, judging wholly
By the secret in your eyes.

But look down now, o'er the city
Sleeping soft among the hills, —
Our dear Florence! That great Pitti
With its steady shadow fills

Half the town up: its unwinking
Cold white windows, as they glare
Down the long streets, set one thinking
Of the old dukes who lived there;

And one pictures those strange men so! —
Subtle brains, and iron thews!
There, the gardens of Lorenzo, —
The long cypress avenues

Creep up slow the stately hillside
Where the merry loungers are.
But far more I love this still side, —
The blue plain you see so far!

Where the shore of bright white villas
Leaves off faint: the purple breadths
Of the olives and the willows:
And the gold-rimmed mountain-widths:

All transfused in slumbrous glory
To one burning point — the sun!
But up here, — slow, cold, and hoary
Reach the olives, one by one:

And the land looks fresh: the yellow
Arbute-berries, here and there,
Growing slowly ripe and mellow
Through a flush of rosy hair.

For the Tramontana last week
Was about: 't is scarce three weeks

Since the snow lay, one white vast streak,
  Upon those old purple peaks.

So to-day among the grasses
  One may pick up tens and twelves
Of young olives, as one passes,
  Blown about, and by themselves

Blackening sullen-ripe. The corn too
  Grows each day from green to golden.
The large-eyed wind-flowers forlorn too
  Blow among it, unbeholden :

Some white, some crimson, others
  Purple blackening to the heart.
From the deep wheat-sea, which smothers
  Their bright globes up, how they start !

And the small wild pinks from tender
  Feather-grasses peep at us :
While above them burns, on slender
  Stems, the red gladiolus :

And the grapes are green : this season
  They 'll be round and sound and true,
If no after-blight should seize on
  Those young bunches turning blue.

O that night of purple weather !
  (Just before the moon had set)
You remember how together
  We walked home ? — the grass was wet —

The long grass in the Poderé —
  With the balmy dew among it :
And that nightingale — the fairy
  Song he sung — O how he sung it !

And the fig-trees had grown heavy
  With the young figs white and woolly,
And the fire-flies, bevy on bevy
  Of soft sparkles, pouring fully

Their warm life through trance on trances
  Of thick citron-shades behind,
Rose, like swarms of loving fancies
  Through some rich and pensive mind.

So we reached the loggia. Leaning
  Faint, we sat there in the shade.
Neither spoke. The night's deep meaning
  Filled the silence up unsaid.

Hoarsely through the cypress alley
  A civetta out of tune
Tried his voice by fits. The valley
  Lay all dark below the moon.

Until into song you burst out, —
  That old song I made for you
When we found our rose, — the first out
  Last sweet Springtime in the dew.

Well ! . . . if things had gone less wildly —
  Had I settled down before
There, in England — labored mildly —
  And been patient — and learned more

Of how men should live in London —
  Been less happy — or more wise —
Left no great works tried, and undone —
  Never looked in your soft eyes —

I . . . but what 's the use of thinking ?
  There ! our nightingale begins —
Now a rising note — now sinking
  Back in little broken rings

Of warm song that spread and eddy —
  Now he picks up heart — and draws
His great music, slow and steady,
  To a silver-centred pause !

SONG.

The purple iris hangs his head
  On his lean stalk, and so declines :
The spider spills his silver thread
  Between the bells of columbines :
An altered light in flickering eves
  Draws dews through these dim eyes of ours :
  Death walks in yonder waning bowers,
And burns the blistering leaves.
    Ah, well-a-day !
    Blooms overblow :
    Suns sink away :
    Sweet things decay.

The drunken beetle, roused ere night,
  Breaks blundering from the rotting rose,
Flits through blue spidery aconite,
  And hums, and comes, and goes :
His thick, bewildered song receives
  A drowsy sense of grief like ours :
  He hums and hums among the bowers,
And bangs about the leaves.
    Ah, well-a-day !
    Hearts overflow :
    Joy flits away :
    Sweet things decay.

Her yellow stars the jasmin drops
In mildewed mosses one by one :
The hollyhocks fall off their tops :
The lotus-blooms ail white i' the sun :
The freckled foxglove faints and grieves :
The smooth-paced slumbrous slug devours
The gluey globes of gorgeous flowers,
And smears the glistering leaves !
Ah, well-a-day !
Life leaves us so.
Love dare not stay.
Sweet things decay.

From brazen sunflowers, orb and fringe,
The burning burnish dulls and dies :
Sad Autumn sets a sullen tinge
Upon the scornful peonies :
The dewy frog limps out, and heaves
A speckled lump in speckled bowers :
A reeking moisture, clings and lowers
The lips of lapping leaves.
Ah, well-a-day !
Ere the cock crow,
Life's charmed array
Reels all away.

SEASIDE SONGS.

I.

Drop down below the orbéd sea,
O lingering light in glowing skies,
And bring my own true-love to me —
My dear true-love across the sea —
With tender-lighted eyes.

For now the gates of Night are flung
Wide open her dark coasts among :
And the happy stars crowd up, and up,
Like bubbles that brighten, one by one,
To the dark wet brim of some glowing cup
Filled full to the parting sun.

And moment after moment grows
In grandeur up from deep to deep
Of darkness, till the night hath clomb,
From star to star, heaven's highest dome,
And, like a new thought born in sleep,
The slumbrous glory glows, and glows :
While, far below, a whisper goes
That heaves the happy sea :
For o'er faint tracts of fragrance wide,
A rapture pouring up the tide —
A freshness through the heat — a sweet,
Uncertain sound, like fairy feet —
The west-wind blows my love to me.

Love-laden from the lighted west
Thou comest, with thy soul opprest
For joy of him : all up the dim,
Delicious sea blow fearlessly,
Warm wind, that art the tenderest
Of all that breathe from south or west,
Blow whispers of him up the sea :
Upon my cheek, and on my breast,
And on the lips which he hath prest,
Blow all his kisses back to me !

Far off, the dark green rocks about,
All night shines, faint and fair, the far light ;
Far off, the lone, late fishers shout
From boat to boat i' the listening starlight :
Far off, and fair, the sea lies bare,
Leagues, leagues beyond the reach of rowing :
Up creek and horn the smooth wave swells
And falls asleep ; or, inland flowing,
Twinkles among the silver shells,
From sluice to sluice of shallow wells ;
Or, down dark pools of purple glowing,
Sets some forlorn star trembling there
In his own dim, dreamlike brilliancy.
And I feel the dark sails growing
Nearer, clearer, up the sea :
And I catch the warm west blowing
All my own love's sighs to me :
On the deck I hear them singing
Songs they sing in my own land :
Lights are swinging : bells are ringing :
On the deck I see him stand !

II.

The day is down into his bower :
In languid lights his feet he steeps :
The flusht sky darkens, low and lower,
And closes on the glowing deeps.

In creeping curves of yellow foam
Up shallow sands the waters slide :
And warmly blow what whispers roam
From isle to isle the lulléd tide :

The boats are drawn: the nets drip bright:
Dark casements gleam: old songs are sung:
And out upon the verge of night
Green lights from lonely rocks are hung.

O winds of eve that somewhere rove
Where darkest sleeps the distant sea,
Seek out where haply dreams my love,
And whisper all her dreams to me!

THE SUMMER-TIME THAT WAS.

THE swallow is not come yet;
The river-banks are brown;
The woodside walks are dumb yet,
And dreary is the town.
I miss a face from the window,
A footstep from the grass;
I miss the boyhood of my heart,
And the summer-time that was.

How shall I read the books I read,
Or meet the men I met?
I thought to find her rose-tree dead,
But it is growing yet.
And the river winds among the flags,
And the leaf lies on the grass.
But I walk alone. My hopes are gone,
And the summer-time that was.

ELAYNE LE BLANC.

O THAT sweet season on the April-verge
Of womanhood! When smiles are toucht with tears,
And all the unsolaced summer seems to grieve
With some blind want: when Eden-exiles feel
Their Paradisal parentage, and search
Even yet some fragrance through the thorny years
From reachless gardens guarded by the sword.

Then those that brood above the fallen sun,
Or lean from lonely casements to the moon,
Turn round and miss the touching of a hand:
Then sad thoughts seem to be more sweet than gay ones:
Then old songs have a sound as pitiful
As dead friends' voices, sometimes heard in dreams:
And all a-tiptoe for some great event,
The Present waits, her finger at her lips,
The while the pensive Past with meek pale palms,
Crost (where a child should lie) on her cold breast,
And wistful eyes forlorn, stands mutely by,
Reproaching Life with some unuttered loss;
And the heart pines, a prisoned Danaë,
Till some God comes, and makes the air all golden.

In such a mood as this, at such an hour
As makes sad thoughts fall saddest on the soul,
She, in her topmost bower all alone,
High-up among the battlemented roofs,
Leaned from the lattice, where the road runs by
To Camelot, and in the bulrush beds
The marish river shrinks his stagnant horn.
All round, along the spectral arras, gleamed
(With faces pale against the dreary light,
Forms of great Queens — the women of old times.
She felt their frowns upon her, and their smiles,
And seemed to hear their garments rustling near.
Her lute lay idle her love-books among:
And, at her feet, flung by, the broidered scarf,
And velvet mantle. On the verge of night
She saw a bird float by, and wished for wings:
She heard the hoarse frogs quarrel in the marsh:
And now and then, with drowsy song and oar,
Some dim barge sliding slow from bridge to bridge,
Down the white river past, and far behind
Left a new silence. Then she fell to muse
Unto what end she came into this earth
Whose reachless beauty made her heart so sad,
As one that loves, but hopes not, inly ails

In gazing on some fair unloving face.
Anon, there dropt down a great gulf of sky
A star she knew; and as she looked at it,
Down-drawn through her intensity of gaze,
One angry ray fell tangled in her tears,
And dashed its blinding brightness in her eyes.
She turned, and caught her lute, and pensively
Rippled a random music down the strings,
And sang . . .

All night the moonbeams bathe the the sward.
There 's not an eye to-night in Joyous-Gard
That is not dreaming something sweet. I wake
Because it is more sweet to dream awake:
Dreaming I see thy face upon the lake.

I am come up from far, love, to behold thee,
That hast waited for me so bravely and well
Thy sweet life long (for the Fairies had told thee
I am the Knight that shall loosen the spell),
And to-morrow morn mine arms shall infold thee:
And to-morrow night . . . ah, who can tell?

As the spirit of some dark lake
Pines at nightfall, wild-awake,
For the approaching consummation
Of a great moon he divines
Coming to her coronation
Of the dazzling stars and signs,
So my heart, my heart,
Darkly (ah, and tremblingly!)
Waits in mystic expectation
(From its wild source far apart)
Until it be filled with thee, —
With the full-orbed light of thee, —
O belovéd as thou art!
With the soft sad smile that flashes
Underneath thy long dark lashes;
And thy floating raven hair
From its wreathéd pearls let slip;
And thy breath, like balmy air;
And thy warm wet rosy lip,
With my first kiss lingering there;
Its sweet secret unrevealed, —
Sealed by me, to me unsealed;
And . . . but, ah! she lies asleep
In yon gray stone castle-keep,
On her lids the happy tear;
And alone I linger here;
And to-morrow morn the fight;
And . . . ah, me! to-morrow night?

Here she brake, trembling, off; and on the lute,
Yet vibrating through its melodious nerves,
A great tear plashed and tinkled. For a while
She sat and mused; and, heavily, drop by drop,
Her tears fell down; then through them a slow smile
Stole, full of April-sweetness; and she sang —
— It was a sort of ballad of the sea:
A song of weather-beaten mariners,
Gray-headed men that had survived all winds
And held a perilous sport among the waves,
Who yet sang on with hearts as bold as when
They cleared their native harbor with a shout,
And lifted golden anchors in the sun.

Merrily, merrily drove our barks, —
Merrily up from the morning beach!
And the brine broke under the prows in sparks;
For a spirit sat high at the helm of each.
We sailed all day; and, when day was done,
Steered after the wake of the sunken sun,
For we meant to follow him out of reach
Till the golden dawn was again begun.

With lifted oars, with shout and song,
Merry mariners all were we!
Every heart beat stout and strong.
Through all the world you would not see,
Though you should journey wide and long,
A comelier company.
And where, the echoing creeks among,
Merrily, steadily,
From bay to bay our barks did fall,

You might hear us singing, one and all,
A song of the mighty sea.
But, just at twilight, down the rocks
Dim forms trooped fast, and clearer grew:
For out upon the sea-sand came
The island-people, whom we knew,
And called us: — girls with glowing locks;
And sunburnt boys that tend the herd
Far up the vale; gray elders too
With silver beards: — their cries we heard:
They called us, each one by his name.

"Could ye not wait a little while,"
We heard them sing, "for all our sakes?
A little while, in this old isle,"
They sung, "among the silver lakes?
For here," they sung, "from horn to horn
Of flowery bays the land is fair:
The hillside glows with grapes: the corn
Grows golden in the vale down there.
Our maids are sad for you," they sung:
"Against the field no sickle falls:
Upon the trees our harps are hung:
Our doors are void: and in the stalls
The little foxes nest; among
The herd-roved hills no shepherd calls:
Your brethren mourn for you," they sung.
"Here weep your wives: here passed your lives
Among the vines, when you were young:
Here dwell your sires: your household fires
Grow cold. Return! return!" they sung.

Then each one saw his kinsman stand
Upon the shore, and wave his hand:
And each grew sad. But still we sung
Our ocean-chorus bold and clear;
And still upon our oars we hung,
And held our course with steadfast cheer.
"For we are bound for distant shores,"
We cried, and faster swept our oars:
"We pine to see the faces there
Of men whose deeds we heard long since,
Who haunt our dreams: gray heroes: kings
Whose fame the wandering minstrel sings:
And maidens, too, more fair than ours,
With deeper eyes and softer hair,
Like hers that left her island bowers
To wed the sullen Cornish Prince
Who keeps his court upon the hill
By the gray coasts of Tyntagill,
And each, before he dies, must gain
Some fairy-land across the main."

But still "return, beloved, return!"
The simple island-people sung:
And still each mariner's heart did burn,
As each his kinsman could discern,
Those dim green rocks among.

"O'er you the rough sea-blasts will blow,"
They sung, "while here the skies are fair:
Our paths are through the fields we know:
And yours you know not where."

But we waved our hands . . . "farewell! farewell!"
We cried . . . "our white sails flap the mast:
Our course is set: our oars are wet:
One day," we cried, "is nearly past:
One day at sea! Farewell! farewell!
No more with you we now may dwell!"

And the next day we were driving free
(With never a sail in sight)
Over the face of the mighty sea,
And we counted the stars next night
Rise over us by two and three
With melancholy light:
A grave-eyed, earnest company, —
And all round the salt foam white!

With this, she ceased, and sighed . . .
"though I were far,
I know yon moated iris would not shed
His purple crown: yon clover-field would ripple
As merry in the waving wind as now:
As soft the Spring down this bare hill would steal,
And in the vale below fling all her flowers:
Each year the wet primroses star the woods:
And violets muffle the sharp rivulets:
Round this lone casement's solitary panes
The wandering ivy move and mount each year:
Each year the red wheat gleam near river-banks:

While, ah, with each my memory from the hearts
Of men would fade, and from their lips my name.
O which were best — the wide, the windy sea,
With golden gleams of undiscovered lands,
Odors, and murmurs — or the placid Port,
From wanton winds, from scornful waves secure,
Under the old, green, happy hills of home?"
She sat forlorn, and pondered. Night was near,
And, marshalling o'er the hills her dewy camps,
Came down the outposts of the sentinel stars.
All in the owlet light she sat forlorn.

Now hostel, hall, and grange, that eve were crammed:
The town being choked to bursting of the gates:
For there the King yet lay with all his Earls,
And the Round Table, numbering all save one.

On many a curving terrace which o'erhung
The long gray river, swan-like, through the green
Of quaintest yews, moved, pacing stately by,
The lovely ladies of King Arthur's court.
Sighing, she eyed them from that lonely keep.

The Dragon-banners o'er the turrets drooped,
The heavy twilight hanging in their folds.
And now and then, from posterns in the wall
The Knights stole, lingering for some last Good-night,
Whispered or sighed through closing lattices;
Or paused with reverence of bending plumes,
And lips on jewelled fingers gayly prest.
The silver cressets shone from pane to pane:
And tapers flitted by with flitting forms:
Clanged the dark streets with clash of iron heels:
Or fell a sound of coits in clattering courts,
And drowsy horse-boys singing in the straw.

These noises floated upward. And within,
From the great Hall, forever and anon,
Brake gusts of revel; snatches of wild song,
And laughter; where her sire among his men
Caroused between the twilight and the dark.
The silence round about her where she sat,
Vext in itself, grew sadder for the sound.
She closed her eyes: before them seemed to float
A dream of lighted revels, — dance and song
In Guenver's palace: gorgeous tournaments;
And rows of glittering eyes about the Queen
(Like stars in galaxies around the moon),
That sparkled recognition down below,
Where rode the Knights amort with lance and plume;
And each his lady's sleeve upon his helm:
Murmuring . . . "none ride for me. Am I not fair,
Whom men call the White Flower of Astolat?"

Far, far without, the wild gray marish spread,
A heron startled from the pools, and flapped
The water from his wings, and skirred away.
The last long limit of the dying light
Dropped, all on fire, behind an iron cloud:
And, here and there, through some wild chasm of blue,
Tumbled a star. The mist upon the fens
Thickened. A billowy opal grew i' the crofts,
Fed on the land, and sucked into itself
Paling and park, close copse and bushless down,
Changing the world for Fairies.
Then the moon
In the low east, unprisoned from black bars

Of stagnant fog (a white light, wrought to the full,
Summed in a perfect orb) rose suddenly up
Upon the silence with a great surprise,
And took the inert landscape unawares.

White, white, the snaky river : dark the banks :
And dark the folding distance, where her eyes
Were wildly turned, as though the whole world lay
In that far blackness over Carlyel.
There she espied Sir Launcelot, as he rode
His coal-black courser downward from afar,
For all his armor glittered as he went,
And showed like silver : and his mighty shield,
By dint of knightly combat hackt and worn,
Looked like some cracked and frozen moon that hangs
By night o'er Baltic headlands all alone.

TO ——.

As, in lone fairy-lands, up some rich shelf
Of golden sand the wild wave moaningly
Heaps its unvalued sea-wealth, weed and gem,
Then creeps back slow into the salt sad sea :
So from my life's new searchéd deeps to thee,
Beloved, I cast these weed-flowers. Smile on them.
More than they mean I know not to express.
So I shrink back into my old sad self,
Far from all words where love lies fathomless.

QUEEN GUENEVERE.

THENCE, up the sea-green floor, among the stems
Of mighty columns whose unmeasured shades
From aisle to aisle, unheeded in the sun,
Moved without sound, I, following all alone
A strange desire that drew me like a hand,
Came unawares upon the Queen.
She sat
In a great silence, which her beauty filled
Full to the heart of it, on a black chair
Mailed all about with sullen gems, and crusts
Of sultry blazonry. Her face was bowed,
A pause of slumbrous beauty, o'er the light
Of some delicious thought new-risen above
The deeps of passion. Round her stately head
A single circlet of the red gold fine
Burned free, from which, on either side streamed down
Twilights of her soft hair, from neck to foot.
Green was her kirtle as the emerolde is,
And stiff from hem to hem with seams of stones
Beyond all value ; which, from left to right
Disparting, half revealed the snowy gleam
Of a white robe of spotless samite pure.
And from the soft repression of her zone,
Which like a light hand on a lutestring pressed
Harmony from its touch, flowed warmly back
The bounteous outlines of a glowing grace,
Nor yet outflowed sweet laws of loveliness.

Then did I feel as one who, much perplext,
Led by strange legends and the light of stars
Over long regions of the midnight sand
Beyond the red tract of the Pyramids,
Is suddenly drawn to look upon the sky
From sense of unfamiliar light, and sees,
Revealed against the constellated cope
The great cross of the South.
The chamber round
Was dropt with arras green ; and I could hear,
In courts far off, a minstrel praising May,
Who sang . . . *Si douce, si douce est la Margarete !*
To a faint lute. Upon the window-sill,
Hard by a latoun bowl that blazed i' the sun

Perched a strange fowl, a Falcon Peregrine ;
With all his feathers puft for pride, and all
His courage glittering outward in his eye ;
For he had flown from far, athwart strange lands,
And o'er the light of many a setting sun,
Lured by his love (such sovereignty of old
Had Beauty in all coasts of Christendom !)
To look into the great eyes of the Queen.

THE NEGLECTED HEART.

This heart, you would not have,
I laid up in a grave
Of song : with love enwound it ;
And set sweet fancies blowing round it.
Then I to others gave it ;
Because you would not have it.
"See you keep it well," I said ;
"This heart 's sleeping — is not dead ;
But will wake some future day :
See you keep it while you may."

All great Sorrows in the world, —
Some with crowns upon their heads,
And in regal purple furled ;
Some with rosaries and beads ;
Some with lips of scorning, curled
At false Fortune ; some, in weeds
Of mourning and of widowhood,
Standing tearful and apart, —
Each one in his several mood,
Came to take my heart.

Then in holy ground they set it :
With melodious weepings wet it :
And revered it as they found it,
With wild fancies blowing round it.

And this heart (you would not have)
Being not dead, though in the grave,
Worked miracles and marvels strange,
And healed many maladies :
Giving sight to sealed-up eyes,
And legs to lame men sick for change.

The fame of it grew great and greater.
Then said you, "Ah, what 's the matter ?
How hath this heart I would not take,
This weak heart a child might break —
This poor, foolish heart of his —
Since won worship such as this ?"

You bethought you then . . . "Ah me
What if this heart, I did not choose
To retain, hath found the key
Of the kingdom ? and I lose
A great power ? Me he gave it :
Mine the right, and I will have it."

Ah, too late ! For crowds exclaimed,
"Ours it is : and hath been claimed.
Moreover, where it lies, the spot
Is holy ground : so enter not
None but men of mournful mind, —
Men to darkened days resigned ;
Equal scorn of Saint and Devil ;
Poor and outcast ; halt and blind ;
Exiles from Life's golden revel ;
Gnawing at the bitter rind
Of old griefs ; or else, confined
In proud cares, to serve and grind, —
May enter : whom this heart shall cure.
But go thou by : thou art not poor :
Nor defrauded of thy lot :
Bless thyself : but enter not !"

APPEARANCES.

Well, you have learned to smile.
And no one looks for traces
Of tears about your eyes.
Your face is like most faces.
And who will ask, meanwhile,
If your face your heart belies ?

Are you happy ? You look so.
Well, I wish you what you seem.
Happy persons sleep so light !
In your sleep you never dream ?
But who would care to know
What dreams you dreamed last night ?

HOW THE SONG WAS MADE.

I sat low down, at midnight, in a vale
Mysterious with the silence of blue pines :
White-cloven by a snaky river-tail,
Uncoiled from tangled wefts of silver twines.

Out of a crumbling castle, on a spike
Of splintered rock, a mile of changeless shade

Gorged half the landscape. Down a dismal dike
Of black hills the sluiced moonbeams streamed, and stayed.

The world lay like a poet in a swoon,
When God is on him, filled with heaven, all through, —
A dim face full of dreams turned to the moon,
With mild lips moist in melancholy dew.

I plucked blue mugwort, livid mandrakes, balls
Of blossomed nightshade, heads of hemlock, long
White grasses, grown in oozy intervals
Of marsh, to make ingredients for a song:

A song of mourning to embalm the Past, —
The corpse-cold Past, — that it should not decay;
But in dark vaults of memory, to the last,
Endure unchanged: for in some future day

I will bring my new love to look at it
(Laying aside her gay robes for a moment)
That, seeing what love came to, she may sit
Silent awhile, and muse, but make no comment.

RETROSPECTIONS.

To-night she will dance at the palace,
With the diamonds in her hair:
And the Prince will praise her beauty —
The loveliest lady there!

But tones, at times, in the music
Will bring back forgotten things:
And her heart will fail her sometimes,
When her beauty is praised at the King's.

There sits in his silent chamber
A stern and sorrowful man:
But a strange sweet dream comes to him,
While the lamp is burning wan,
Of a sunset among the vineyards
In a lone and lovely land,
And a maiden standing near him,
With fresh wild-flowers in her hand.

THY VOICE ACROSS MY SPIRIT FALLS.

Thy voice across my spirit falls
Like some spent sea-wind through dim halls
Of ocean-kings, left bare and wide
(Green floors o'er which the sea-weed crawls!)
Where once, long since, in festal pride
Some Chief, who roved and ruled the tide,
Among his brethren reigned and died.

I dare not meet thine eyes; for so,
In gazing there, I seem once more
To lapse away through days of yore
To homes where laugh and song is o'er,
Whose inmates each went long ago —

Like some lost soul, that keeps the semblance
On its brow of ancient grace
Not all faded, wandering back
To silent chambers, in the track
Of the twilight, from the Place
Of retributive Remembrance.
Ah, turn aside those eyes again!
Their light has less of joy than pain.
We are not now what we were then.

THE RUINED PALACE.

Broken are the Palace windows:
Rotting is the Palace floor.
The damp wind lifts the arras,
And swings the creaking door;
But it only startles the white owl
From his perch on a monarch's throne,
And the rat that was gnawing the harp-strings
A Queen once played upon.

Dare you linger here at midnight
Alone, when the wind is about,
And the bat, and the newt, and the viper,
And the creeping things come out?
Beware of these ghostly chambers!
Search not what my heart hath been,
Lest you find a phantom sitting
Where once there sat a Queen.

A VISION OF VIRGINS.

I HAD a vision of the night.

It seemed
There was a long red tract of barren land,
Blockt in by black hills, where a half-moon dreamed
Of morn, and whitened.
Drifts of dry brown sand,
This way and that, were heapt below: and flats
Of water: — glaring shallows, where strange bats
Came and went, and moths flickered.
To the right,
A dusty road that crept along the waste
Like a white snake: and, farther up, I traced
The shadow of a great house, far in sight:
A hundred casements all ablaze with light:
And forms that flit athwart them as in haste:
And a slow music, such as sometimes kings
Command at mighty revels, softly sent
From viol, and flute, and tabor, and the strings
Of many a sweet and slumbrous instrument
That wound into the mute heart of the night
Out of that distance.
Then I could perceive
A glory pouring through an open door,
And in the light five women. I believe
They wore white vestments, all of them. They were
Quite calm; and each still face unearthly fair,
Unearthly quiet. So like statues all,
Waiting they stood without that lighted hall;
And in their hands, like a blue star, they held
Each one a silver lamp.
Then I beheld
A shadow in the doorway. And One came
Crowned for a feast. I could not see the Face.
The Form was not all human. As the flame
Streamed over it, a presence took the place
With awe.
He, turning, took them by the hand,
And led them each up the white stairway, and
The door closed.

At that moment the moon dipped
Behind a rag of purple vapor, ript
Off a great cloud, some dead wind, ere it spent
Its last breath, had blown open, and so rent
You saw behind blue pools of light, and there
A wild star swimming in the lurid air.
The dream was darkened. And a sense of loss
Fell like a nightmare on the land: because
The moon yet lingered in her cloud-eclipse.
Then, in the dark, swelled sullenly across
The waste a wail of women.
Her blue lips
The moon drew up out of the cloud.
Again
I had a vision on that midnight plain.

Five women: and the beauty of despair
Upon their faces: locks of wild wet hair,
Clammy with anguish, wandered low and loose
O'er their bare breasts, that seemed too filled with trouble
To feel the damp crawl of the midnight dews
That trickled down them. One was bent half double,
A dismayed heap, that hung o'er the last spark
Of a lamp slowly dying. As she blew
The dull light redder, and the dry wick flew
In crumbling sparkles all about the dark,
I saw a light of horror in her eyes;
A wild light on her flusht cheek; a wild white
On her dry lips; an agony of surprise
Fearfully fair.
The lamp dropped. From my sight
She fell into the dark.
Beside her, sat
One without motion: and her stern face flat
Against the dark sky.
One, as still as death,
Hollowed her hands about her lamp, for fear

Some motion of the midnight, or her breath,
Should fan out the last flicker. Rosy-clear
The light oozed, through her fingers, o'er her face.
There was a ruined beauty hovering there
Over deep pain, and, dasht with lurid grace
A waning bloom.
The light grew dim and blear:
And she, too, slowly darkened in her place.
Another, with her white hands hotly lockt
About her damp knees, muttering madness, rocked
Forward and backward. But at last she stopped,
And her dark head upon her bosom dropped
Motionless.
Then one rose up with a cry
To the great moon; and stretched a wrathful arm
Of wild expostulation to the sky,
Murmuring, "These earth-lamps fail us! and what harm?
Does not the moon shine? Let us rise and haste
To meet the Bridegroom yonder o'er the waste!
For now I seem to catch once more the tone
Of viols on the night. 'T were better done,
At worst, to perish near the golden gate,
And fall in sight of glory one by one,
Than here all night upon the wild, to wait
Uncertain ills. Away! the hour is late!"

Again the moon dipped.
I could see no more.
Not the least gleam of light did heaven afford.

At last, I heard a knocking on a door,
And some one crying, "Open to us, Lord!"
There was an awful pause.
I heard my heart
Beat.
Then a Voice — "I know you not. Depart."
I caught, within, a glimpse of glory. And
The door closed.
Still in darkness dreamed the land.
I could not see those women. Not a breath!
Darkness, and awe: a darkness more than death.
The darkness took them. * * * * *

LEOLINE.

In the molten-golden moonlight,
In the deep grass warm and dry,
We watched the fire-fly rise and swim
In floating sparkles by.
All night the hearts of nightingales,
Song-steeping, slumbrous leaves,
Flowed to us in the shadow there
Below the cottage-eaves.

We sang our songs together
Till the stars shook in the skies.
We spoke — we spoke of common things,
Yet the tears were in our eyes.
And my hand, — I know it trembled
To each light warm touch of thine.
But we were friends, and only friends,
My sweet friend, Leoline!

How large the white moon looked, Dear!
There has not ever been
Since those old nights the same great light
In the moons which I have seen.
I often wonder, when I think,
If you have thought so too,
And the moonlight has grown dimmer, Dear,
Than it used to be to you.

And sometimes, when the warm west-wind
Comes faint across the sea,
It seems that you have breathed on it,
So sweet it comes to me:
And sometimes, when the long light wanes
In one deep crimson line,
I muse, "and does she watch it too,
Far off, sweet Leoline?"

And often, leaning all day long
My head upon my hands,
My heart aches for the vanisht time
In the far fair foreign lands:

Thinking sadly — "Is she happy?"
Has she tears for those old hours?
And the cottage in the starlight?
And the songs among the flowers?"

One night we sat below the porch,
And out in that warm air,
A fire-fly, like a dying star,
Fell tangled in her hair;
But I kissed him lightly off again,
And he glittered up the vine,
And died into the darkness
For the love of Leoline!

Between two songs of Petrarch
I 've a purple rose-leaf prest,
More sweet than common rose-leaves,
For it once lay in her breast.
When she gave me that her eyes were wet,
The rose was full of dew.
The rose is withered long ago:
The page is blistered too.

There 's a blue flower in my garden,
The bee loves more than all:
The bee and I, we love it both,
Though it is frail and small.
She loved it too, — long, long ago!
Her love was less than mine.
Still we are friends, but only friends,
My lost love, Leoline!

SPRING AND WINTER.

The world buds every year:
But the heart just once, and when
The blossom falls off sere
No new blossom comes again.
Ah, the rose goes with the wind:
But the thorns remain behind.

Was it well in him, if he
Felt not love, to speak of love so?
If he still unmoved must be,
Was it nobly sought to move so?
— Pluck the flower, and yet not wear it —
Spurn, despise it, yet not spare it?

Need he say that I was fair,
With such meaning in his tone,
Just to speak of one whose hair
Had the same tinge as my own?
Pluck my life up, root and bloom,
Just to plant it on her tomb?

And she 'd scarce so fair a face
(So he used to say) as mine:
And her form had far less grace:
And her brow was far less fine:
But 't was just that he loved then
More than he can love again.

Why, if Beauty could not bind him,
Need he praise me, speaking low:
Use my face just to remind him
How no face could please him now?
Why, if loving could not move him,
Did he teach me still to love him?

And he said my eyes were bright,
But his own, he said, were dim:
And my hand, he said, was white,
But what was that to him?
"For," he said, "in gazing at you,
I seem gazing at a statue."

"Yes!" he said, "he had grown wise now:
He had suffered much of yore:
But a fair face to his eyes now,
Was a fair face, and no more.
Yet the anguish and the bliss,
And the dream too, had been his."

Then, why talk of "lost romances"
Being "sick of sentiment!"
And what meant those tones and glances
If real love was never meant?
Why, if his own youth were withered,
Must mine also have been gathered?

Why those words a thought too tender
For the commonplaces spoken?
Looks whose meaning seemed to render
Help to words when speech came broken?
Why so late in July moonlight
Just to say what 's said by noonlight?

And why praise my youth for gladness,
Keeping something in his smile
Which turned all my youth to sadness,
He still smiling all the while?
Since, when so my youth was over
He said — "Seek some younger lover!"

"For the world buds once a year,
But the heart just once," he said.
True! . . . so now that Spring is here
All my flowers, like his, are dead.
And the rose drops in the wind.
But the thorns remain behind.

KING HERMANDIAZ.

THEN, standing by the shore, I saw the moon
Change hue, and dwindle in the west, as when
Warm looks fade inward out of dying eyes,
And the dim sea began to moan.
I knew
My hour had come, and to the bark I went.
Still were the stately decks, and hung with silk
Of stoléd crimson: at the mast-head burned
A steadfast fire with influence like a star,
And underneath a couch of gold. I loosed
The dripping chain. There was not any wind:
But all at once the magic sails began
To belly and heave, and like a bat that wakes
And flits by night, beneath her swarthy wings
The black ship rocked and moved. I heard anon
A humming in the cordage and a sound
Like bees in summer, and the bark went on,
And on, and on, until at last the world
Was rolled away and folded out of sight,
And I was all alone on the great sea.
There a deep awe fell on my spirit. My wound
Began to bite. I, gazing round, beheld
A lady sitting silent at the helm,
A woman white as death, and fair as dreams.
I would have asked her "Whither do we sail?"
And "how?" but that my fear clung at my heart,
And held me still. She, answering my doubt,
Said slowly, "To the Isle of Avalon."

And straightway we were nigh a strand all gold,
That glittered in the moon between the dusk
Of hanging bowers made rich with blooms and balms,
From which faint gusts came to me; and I heard
A sound of lutes among the vales, and songs
And voices faint like voices through a dream
That said or seemed to say, "Hail, Hermandiaz!"

SONG.

IN the warm, black mill-pool winking,
The first doubtful star shines blue:
And alone here I lie thinking
O such happy thoughts of you!

Up the porch the roses clamber,
And the flowers we sowed last June;
And the casement of your chamber
Shines between them to the moon.

Look out, Love! fling wide the lattice:
Wind the red rose in your hair,
And the little white clematis
Which I plucked for you to wear:

Or come down, and let me hear you
Singing in the scented grass,
Through tall cowslips nodding near you,
Just to touch you as you pass.

For, where you pass, the air
With warm hints of love grows wise:
You — the dew on your dim hair,
And the smile in your soft eyes!

From the hayfield comes your brother;
There your sisters stand together,
Singing clear to one another
Through the dark blue summer weather,

And the maid the latch is clinking,
As she lets her lover through:
But alone, Love, I lie thinking
O such tender thoughts of you!

THE SWALLOW.

O SWALLOW chirping in the sparkling eaves,
Why hast thou left far south thy fairy homes,
To build between these drenchéd April-leaves,
And sing me songs of Spring before it comes?

Too soon thou singest! Yon black stubborn thorn
Bursts not a bud: the sneaping wind drifts on.
She that once flung thee crumbs, and in the morn
Sang from the lattice where thou sing'st, is gone.
Here is no Spring. Thy flight yet further follow.
Fly off, vain swallow!

Thou com'st to mock me with remembered things.
I love thee not, O bird for me too gay.
That which I want thou hast, — the gift of wings:
Grief — which I have — thou hast not. Fly away!
What hath my roof for thee? My cold dark roof,
Beneath whose weeping thatch thine eggs will freeze!
Summer will halt not here, so keep aloof.
Others are gone; go thou. In those wet trees
I see no Spring, though thou still singest of it.
Fare hence, false prophet!

CONTRABAND.

A HEAP of low, dark, rocky coast,
Where the blue-black sea sleeps smooth and even:
And the sun, just over the reefs at most,
In the amber part of a pale blue heaven:

A village asleep below the pines,
Hid up the gray shore from the low slow sun:
And a maiden that lingers among the vines,
With her feet in the dews, and her locks undone:

The half-moon melting out of the sky;
And, just to be seen still, a star here, a star there,
Faint, high up in the heart of the heaven; so high
And so faint, you can scarcely be sure that they are there.

And one of that small, black, raking craft;
Two swivel guns on a round deck handy;
And a great sloop sail with the wind abaft;
And four brown thieves round a cask of brandy.

That 's my life, as I left it last.
And what it may be henceforth I know not.
But all that I keep of the merry Past
Are trifles like these, which I care to show not: —

A leathern flask, and a necklace of pearl;
These rusty pistols, this tattered chart, Friend,
And the soft dark half of a raven curl;
And, at evening, the thought of a true, true heart, Friend.

EVENING.

ALREADY evening! In the duskiest nook
Of yon dusk corner, under the Death's-head,
Between the alembecs, thrust this legended,
And iron-bound, and melancholy book,
For I will read no longer. The loud brook
Shelves his sharp light up shallow banks thin-spread;
The slumbrous west grows slowly red, and red:
Up from the ripened corn her silver hook
The moon is lifting: and deliciously
Along the warm blue hills the day declines:
The first star brightens while she waits for me,
And round her swelling heart the zone grows tight:
Musing, half-sad, in her soft hair she twines
The white rose, whispering "he will come to-night!"

ADON.

I WILL not weep for Adon !
I will not waste my breath to draw thick sighs
For Spring's dead greenness. All the orient skies
Are husht, and breathing out a bright surprise
Round morning's marshalling star : Rise, Eos, rise !
Day's dazzling spears are up : the faint stars fade on
The white hills, — cold, like Adon !

O'er crag, and spar, and splinter
Break down, and roll the amber mist, stern light.
The black pines dream of dawn. The skirts of night
Are ravelled in the East. And planted bright
In heaven, the roots of ice shine, sharp and white,
In frozen ray, and spar, and spike, and splinter.
Within me and without, all 's Winter.

Why should I weep for Adon ?
Am I, because the sweet Past is no more,
Dead, as the leaves upon the graves of yore ?
I will breathe boldly, though the air be frore
With freezing fire. Life still beats at the core
Of the world's heart, though Death his awe hath laid on
This dumb white corpse of Adon.

THE PROPHET.

WHEN the East lightens with strange hints of morn,
The first tinge of the growing glory takes
The cold crown of some husht high alp forlorn,
While yet o'er vales below the dark is spread.
Even so the dawning Age, in silence, breaks,
O solitary soul, on thy still head :
And we, that watch below with reverent fear,
Seeing thee crowned, do know that day is near.

WEALTH.

WAS it not enough to dream the day to death
Grandly ? and finely feed on faint perfumes ?
Between the heavy lilacs draw thick breath,
While the noon hummed from glowing citron-glooms ?

Or walk with Morning in these dewy bowers,
'Mid sheaved lilies, and the moth-loved lips
Of purple asters, bearded flat sunflowers,
And milk-white crumpled pinks with blood i' the tips ?

But I must also, gazing upon thee,
Pine with delicious pain, and subtle smart,
Till I felt heavy immortality,
Laden with looks of thine, weigh on my heart !

WANT.

YOU swore you loved me all last June :
And now December 's come and gone.
The Summer went with you — too soon.
The Winter goes — alone.

Next Spring the leaves will all be green :
But love like ours, once turned to pain,
Can be no more what it hath been,
Though roses bloom again.

Return, return the unvalued wealth
I gave ! which scarcely profits you —
The heart 's lost youth — the soul 's lost health —
In vain ! . . . false friend, adieu !

I keep one faded violet
Of all once ours, — you left no more.
What I have lost I may forget,
But you cannot restore.

A BIRD AT SUNSET.

WILD bird, that wingest wide the glimmering moors,
Whither, by belts of yellowing woods away ?

With pausing sunset thy wild heart allures
Deep into dying day?

Would that my heart, on wings like thine, could pass
Where stars their light in rosy regions lose, —
A happy shadow o'er the warm brown grass,
Falling with falling dews!

Hast thou, like me, some true-love of thine own,
In fairy lands beyond the utmost seas;
Who there, unsolaced, yearns for thee alone,
And sings to silent trees?

O tell that woodbird that the Summer grieves,
And the suns darken and the days grow cold;
And, tell her, love will fade with fading leaves,
And cease in common mould.

Fly from the winter of the world to her!
Fly, happy bird! I follow in thy flight,
Till thou art lost o'er yonder fringe of fir
In baths of crimson light.

My love is dying far away from me.
She sits and saddens in the fading west.
For her I mourn all day, and pine to be
At night upon her breast.

IN TRAVEL.

Now our white sail flutters down:
Now it broadly takes the breeze:
Now the wharves upon the town,
Lessening, leave us by degrees.
Blithely blows the morning, shaking
On your cheek the loosened curls:
Round our prow the cleft wave, breaking,
Tumbles off in heapéd pearls,
Which in forks of foam unite,
And run seething out to sea,
Where o'er gleams of briny light,
Dip the dancing gulls in glee.
Now the mountain serpentine
Slips out many a snaky line
Down the dark blue ocean-spine.
From the boatside, while we pass,
I can see, as in a glass,
Pirates on the flat sea-sand,
Carousing ere they put from land;
And the purple-pointed crests
Of hills whereon the morning rests
Whose ethereal vivid peaks
Glimmer in the lucid creeks.
Now these wind away; and now
Hamlets up the mountain-brow
Peep and peer from roof to roof;
And gray castle-walls aloof
O'er wide vineyards just in grape,
From whose serfs old Barons held
Tax and toll in feudal eld,
Creep out of the uncoiling cape.
Now the long low layer of mist
A slow trouble rolls and lifts,
With a broken billowy motion,
From the rocks and from the rifts,
Laying bare, just here and there,
Black stone-pines, at morn dew-kist
By salt winds from bound to bound
Of the great sea freshening round;
Wattled folds on bleak brown downs
Sloping high o'er sleepy towns;
Lengths of shore and breadths of ocean.

Love, lean here upon my shoulder,
And look yonder, love, with me:
Now I think that I can see
In the merry market-places
Sudden warmths of sunny faces:
Many a lovely laughing maiden
Bearing on her loose dark locks
Rich fruit-baskets heavy-laden,
In and out among the rocks,
Knowing not that we behold her.
Now, love, tell me, can you hear,
Growing nearer, and more near,
Sound of song, and plash of oar,
From wild bays, and inlets hoar,
While above yon isles afar
Ghostlike sinks last night's last star?

CHANGES.

Whom first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And Life, indeed, is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead.
And then, we women cannot choose our lot.

"Dip the dancing gulls in glee." Page 392.

Much must be borne which it is hard to bear:
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
God help us all! who need, indeed, His care.
And yet, I know, the Shepherd loves His sheep.

My little boy begins to babble now
Upon my knee his earliest infant prayer.
He has his father's eager eyes, I know.
And, they say too, his mother's sunny hair.

But when he sleeps and smiles upon my knee,
And I can feel his light breath come and go,
I think of one (Heaven help and pity me!)
Who loved me, and whom I loved, long ago.

Who might have been . . . ah, what I dare not think!
We all are changed. God judges for us best.
God help us do our duty, and not shrink,
And trust in heaven humbly for the rest.

But blame us women not, if some appear
Too cold at times; and some too gay and light.
Some griefs gnaw deep. Some woes are hard to bear.
Who knows the Past? and who can judge us right?

Ah, were we judged by what we might have been,
And not by what we are, too apt to fall!
My little child — he sleeps and smiles between
These thoughts and me. In heaven we shall know all!

JUDICIUM PARIDIS.

I said, when young, "Beauty 's the supreme joy.
Her I will choose, and in all forms will face her;
Eye to eye, lip to lip, and so embrace her
With my whole heart." I said this being a boy.

"First, I will seek her, — naked, or clad only
In her own godhead, as I know of yore
Great bards beheld her." So by sea and shore
I sought her, and among the mountains lonely.

"There be great sunsets in the wondrous West;
And marvel in the orbings of the moon;
And glory in the jubilees of June;
And power in the deep ocean. For the rest,

"Green-glaring glaciers; purple clouds of pine
White walls of ever-roaring cataracts;
Blue thunder drifting over thirsty tracts;
The homes of eagles; these, too, are divine,

"And terror shall not daunt me — so it be
Beautiful — or in storm or in eclipse:
Rocking pink shells, or wrecking freighted ships,
I shall not shrink to find her in the sea.

"Next, I will seek her — in all shapes of wood,
Or brass, or marble; or in colors clad;
And sensuous lines, to make my spirit glad.
And she shall change her dress with every mood.

"Rose-latticed casements, lone in summer lands —
Some witch's bower: pale sailors on the marge
Of magic seas, in an enchanted barge
Stranded, at sunset, upon jewelled sands:

"White nymphs among the lilies: shepherd kings:
And pink-hooved Fawns: and mooned Endymions:
From every channel through which Beauty runs
To fertilize the world with lovely things.

"I will draw freely, and be satisfied.
Also, all legends of her apparition
To men, in earliest times, in each condition,
I will inscribe on portraits of my bride.

"Then, that no single sense of her be wanting,
Music; and all voluptuous combinations
Of sound, with their melodious palpitations
To charm the ear, the cells of fancy haunting.

"And in her courts my life shall be outrolled
As one unfurls some gorgeous tapestry,
Wrought o'er with old Olympian heraldry,
All purple-woven stiff with blazing gold.

"And I will choose no sight for tears to flow:
I will not look at sorrow: I will see
Nothing less fair and full of majesty
Than young Apollo leaning on his bow.

"And I will let things come and go: nor range
For knowledge: but from moments pluck delight,
The while the great days ope and shut in light,
And wax and wane about me, rich with change.

"Some cup of dim hills, where a white moon lies,
Dropt out of weary skies without a breath,
In a great pool: a slumbrous vale beneath:
And blue damps prickling into white fire-flies:

"Some sunset vision of an Oread, less
Than half an hour ere moonrise caught asleep
With a flusht cheek, among crusht violets deep, —
A warm half-glimpse of milk-white nakedness,

"On sumptuous summer eves: shall wake for me
Rapture from all the various stops of life:
Making it like some charmed Arcadian fife
Filled by a wood-god with his ecstasy."

These things I said while I was yet a boy,
And the world showed as between dream and waking
A man may see the face he loves. So, breaking
Silence, I cried . . . "Thou art the supreme Joy!"

My spirit, as a lark hid near the sun,
Carolled at morning. But ere she had dropt
Half down the rainbow-colored years that propped
Her gold cloud up, and broadly, one by one

The world's great harvest-lands broke on her eye,
She changed her tone, . . . "What is it I may keep?
For look here, how the merry reapers reap:
Even children glean: and each puts something by.

"The pomps of morning pass: when evening comes,
What is retained of these which I may show?
If for the hills I leave the fields below
I fear to die an exile from men's homes.

"Though here I see the orient pageants pass,
I am not richer than the merest hind
That toils below, all day, among his kind,
And clinks at eve glad horns in the dry grass."

Then, pondering long, at length I made confession.
"I have erred much, rejecting all that man did:
For all my pains I shall go empty-handed:
And Beauty, of its nature foils possession."

Thereafter, I said . . . "Knowledge is most fair.
Surely to know is better than to see.

To see is loss : to know is gain : and we
Grow old. I will store thriftily, with care."

In which mood I endured for many years,
Valuing all things for their further uses :
And seeking knowledge at all open sluices :
Though oft the stream turned brackish with my tears.

Yet not the less, for years in this same mood
I rested : nor from any object turned
That had its secret to be spelled and learned,
Murmuring ever, "Knowledge is most good."

Unto which end I shunned the revelling
And ignorant crowd, that eat the fruits and die :
And called out Plato from his century
To be my helpmate : and made Homer sing.

Until the awful Past in gathered heaps
Weighed on my brain, and sunk into my soul,
And saddened through my nature, till the whole
Of life was darkened downward to the deeps.

And, wave on wave, the melancholy ages
Crept o'er my spirit : and the years displaced
The landmarks of the days : life waned, effaced
From action by the sorrows of the sages :

And my identity became at last
The record of those others : or, if more,
A hollow shell the sea sung in : a shore
Of footprints which the waves washed from it fast.

And all was as a dream whence, holding breath,
It seemed, at times, just possible to break
By some wild nervous effort, with a shriek,
Into the real world of life and death.

But that thought saved me. Through the dark I screamed
Against the darkness, and the darkness broke,
And broke that nightmare : back to life I woke,
Though weary with the dream which I had dreamed.

O life ! life ! life ! With laughter and with tears
I tried myself : I knew that I had need
Of pain to prove that this was life indeed,
With its warm privilege of hopes and fears.

O Love of man made Life of man, that saves !
O man, that standest looking on the light :
That standest on the forces of the night :
That standest up between the stars and graves !

O man ! by man's dread privilege of pain,
Dare not to scorn thine own soul nor thy brother's :
Though thou be more or less than all the others.
Man's life is all too sad for man's disdain.

The smiles of seraphs are less awful far
Than are the tears of this humanity,
That sound, in dropping, through Eternity,
Heard in God's ear beyond the furthest star.

If that be true, — the hereditary hate
Of Love's lost Rebel, since the worlds began, —
The very Fiend, in hating, honors Man :
Flattering with Devil-homage Man's estate.

If two Eternities, at strife for us,
Around each human soul wage silent war,
Dare we disdain ourselves, though fall'n we are,
With Hell and Heaven looking on us thus !

Whom God hath loved, whom Devils dare not scorn,
Despise not thou, — the meanest human creature.
Climb, if thou canst, the heights of thine own nature,
And look toward Paradise where each was born.

So I spread sackcloth on my former pride:
And sat down, clothed and covered up with shame:
And cried to God to take away my blame
Among my brethren: and to these I cried

To come between my crime and my despair,
That they might help my heart up, when God sent
Upon my soul its proper punishment,
Lest that should be too great for me to bear.

And so I made my choice: and learned to live
Again, and worship, as my spirit yearned:
So much had been admired — so much been learned —
So much been given me — O, how much to give!

Here is the choice, and now the time, O chooser!
Endless the consequence though brief the choice.
Echoes are waked down ages by thy voice:
Speak: and be thou the gainer or the loser.

And I bethought me long . . . "Though garners split,
If none but thou be fed art thou more full?"
For surely Knowledge and the Beautiful
Are human; must have love, or die for it!

To Give is better than to Know or See:
And both are means: and neither is the end:
Knowing and seeing, if none call thee friend,
Beauty and knowledge have done naught for thee.

Though I at Aphroditë all day long
Gaze until sunset with a thirsty eye
I shall not drain her boundless beauty dry
By that wild gaze: nor do her fair face wrong.

For who gives, giving, doth win back his gift:
And knowledge by division grows to more:
Who hides the Master's talent shall die poor,
And starve at last of his own thankless thrift.

I did this for another: and, behold!
My work hath blood in it: but thine hath none:
Done for thyself, it dies in being done:
To what thou buyest thou thyself art sold.

Give thyself utterly away. Be lost.
Choose some one, something: not thyself, thine own:
Thou canst not perish: but, thrice greater grown, —
Thy gain the greatest where thy loss was most, —

Thou in another shalt thyself new-find.
The single globule, lost in the wide sea,
Becomes an ocean. Each identity
Is greatest in the greatness of its kind.

Who serves for gain, a slave, by thankless pelf
Is paid: who gives himself is priceless, free.
I give myself, a man, to God: lo, He
Renders me back a saint unto myself!

NIGHT.

Come to me, not as once thou camest, Night!
With light and splendor up the gorgeous West;
Easing the heart's rich sense of thee with sighs
Sobbed out of all emotion on Love's breast;
While the dark world waned wavering into rest,
Half seen athwart the dim delicious light
Of languid eyes:

But softly, soberly; and dark — more dark!
Till my life's shadow lose itself in thine.
Athwart the light of slowly-gathering tears,
That come between me and the starlight, shine
From distant melancholy deeps divine,
While day slips downward through a rosy arc
To other spheres.

SONG.

Flow, freshly flow,
Dark stream, below!
While stars grow light above:
By willowy banks, through lonely downs,
Past terraced walls in silent towns,
And bear me to my love!

Still, as we go,
Blow, gently blow,
Warm wind, and blithely move
These dreamy sails, that slowly glide, —
A shadow on the shining tide
That bears me to my love.

Fade, sweetly fade
In dewy shade
On lonely grange and grove,
O lingering day! and bring the night
Through all her milk-white mazes bright
That tremble o'er my love.

The sunset wanes
From twinkling panes.
Dim, misty myriads move
Down glimmering streets. One light I see —
One happy light, that shines for me,
And lights me to my love!

FORBEARANCE.

Call me not, Love, unthankful or unkind,
That I have left my heart with thee, and fled.
I were not worth that wealth which I resigned,
Had I not chosen poverty instead.
Grant me but solitude! I dare not swerve
From my soul's law, — a slave, though serving thee.
I but forbear more grandly to deserve:
The free gift only cometh of the free.

HELIOS HYPERIONIDES.

Helios all day long his allotted labor pursues;
No rest to his passionate heart and his panting horses given,
From the moment when roseate-fingered Eos kindles the dews
And spurns the salt sea-floors, ascending silvery the heaven,
Until from the hand of Eos Hesperos, trembling, receives
His fragrant lamp, and faint in the twilight hangs it up.
Then the over-wearied son of Hyperion lightly leaves
His dusty chariot, and softly slips into his golden cup:
And to holy Æthiopia, under the ocean-stream,
Back from the sunken retreats of the sweet Hesperides,
Leaving his unloved labor, leaving his unyoked team,
He sails to his much-loved wife; and stretches his limbs at ease
In a laurelled lawn divine, on a bed of beaten gold,
Where he pleasantly sleeps, forgetting his travel by lands and seas,
Till again the clear-eyed Eos comes with a finger cold,
And again, from his white wife severed, Hyperionides
Leaps into his flaming chariot, angrily gathers the reins,
Headlong flings his course through Uranos, much in wrath,
And over the seas and mountains, over the rivers and plains,
Chafed at heart, tumultuous, pushes his burning path.

ELISABETTA SIRANI.

1665.

Just to begin, — and end! so much, — no more!
To touch upon the very point at last

Where life should cling: to feel the solid shore
Safe; where, the seething sea's strong toil o'erpast,
Peace seemed appointed; then, with all the store
Half-undivulged of the gleaned ocean cast,
Like a discouraged wave's on the bleak strand,
Where what appeared some temple (whose glad Priest
To gather ocean's sparkling gift should stand,
Bidding the wearied wave, from toil releast,
Sleep in the marble harbors bathed with bland
And quiet sunshine, flowing from full east
Among the laurels) proves the dull blind rock's
Fantastic front, — to die, a disallowed,
Dasht purpose: which the scornful shore-cliff mocks,
Even as it sinks; and all its wealth bestowed
In vain, — mere food to feed, perchance, stray flocks
Of the coarse sea-gull! weaving its own shroud
Of idle foam, swift ceasing to be seen!
— Sad, sad, my father! . . . yet it comes to this.
For I am dying. All that might have been —
That must have been! . . . the days, so hard to miss,
So sure to come! . . . eyes, lips, that seemed to lean
In on me at my work, and almost kiss
The curls bowed o'er it, . . . lost! O, never doubt
I should have lived to know them all again,
And from the crowd of praisers single out
For special love those forms beheld so plain
Beforehand. When my pictures, borne about
Bologna, to the church doors, led their train
Of kindling faces, turned, as by they go,
Up to these windows, — standing at your side
Unseen, to see them, I (be sure!) should know
And welcome back those eyes and lips, descried
Long since in fancy: for I loved them so,
And so believed them! Think! . . . Bologna's pride
My paintings! . . . Guido Reni's mantle mine . . .
And I, the maiden artist, prized among
The masters, . . . ah, that dream was too divine
For earth to realize! I die so young,
All this escapes me! God, the gift be Thine,
Not man's then . ... better so! That throbbing throng
Of human faces fades out fast. Even yours,
Beloved ones, the inexorable Fate
(For all our vowed affections!) scarce endures
About me. Must I go, then, desolate
Out from among you? Nay, my work insures
Fit guerdon somewhere, — though the gift must wait!
Had I lived longer, life would sure have set
Earth's gift of fame in safety. But I die.
Death must make safe the heavenly guerdon yet.
I trusted time for immortality, —
There was my error! Father, never let
Doubt of reward confuse my memory!
Besides, — I have done much: and what is done
Is well done. All my heart conceived, my hand
Made fast . . . mild martyr, saint, and weeping nun,
And truncheoned prince, and warrior with bold brand,
Yet keep my life upon them; — as the sun,
Though fallen below the limits of the land,
Still sees on every form of purple cloud
His painted presence.

Flaring August 's here,
September 's coming! Summer's broidered shroud
Is borne away in triumph by the year:
Red Autumn drops, from all his branches bowed,
His careless wealth upon the costly bier.

We must be cheerful. Set the casement wide.
One last look o'er the places I have loved,
One last long look! . . . Bologna, O my pride
Among thy palaced streets! The days have moved
Pleasantly o'er us. What has been denied
To our endeavor? Life goes unreproved.
To make the best of all things, is the best
Of all means to be happy. This I know,
But cannot phrase it finely. The night's rest
The day's toil sweetens. Flowers are warmed by snow.
All 's well God wills. Work out this grief. Joy's zest
Itself is salted with a touch of woe.
There 's nothing comes to us may not be borne,
Except a too great happiness. But this
Comes rarely. Though I know that you will mourn
The little maiden helpmate you must miss,
Thanks be to God, I leave you not forlorn.
There should be comfort in this dying kiss.
Let Barbara keep my colors for herself.
I 'm sorry that Lucia went away
In some unkindness. 'T was a cheerful elf!
Send her my scarlet ribands, mother; say
I thought of her. My palette 's on the shelf,
Surprised, no doubt, at such long holiday.
In the south window, on the easel, stands
My picture for the Empress Eleänore,
Still wanting some few touches, these weak hands
Must leave to others. Yet there 's time before
The year ends. And the Empress' own commands
You 'll find in writing. Barbara's brush is more
Like mine than Anna's; let her finish it.
O, . . . and there 's 'Maso, our poor fisherman!
You 'll find my work done for him: something fit
To hang among his nets: you liked the plan
My fancy took to please our friend's dull wit,
Scarce brighter than his old tin fishing-can. . . .
St. Margaret, stately as a ship full sail,
Leading a dragon by an azure band;
The ribbon flutters gayly in the gale;
The monster follows the Saint's guiding hand,
Wrinkled to one grim smile from head to tail:
For in his horny hide his heart grows bland.
— Where are you, dear ones? . . .

'T is the dull, faint chill,
Which soon will shrivel into burning pain!
Dear brother, sisters, father, mother, — still
Stand near me! While your faces fixt remain
Within my sense, vague fears of unknown ill
Are softly crowded out, . . . and yet, 't is vain!
Greet Giulio Banzi; greet Antonio; greet Bartolomeo, kindly. When I 'm gone,
And in the school-room, as of old, you meet,
— Ah, yes! you 'll miss a certain merry tone,
A cheerful face, a smile that should complete
The vague place in the household picture grown
To an aspect so familiar, it seems strange
That aught should alter there. Mere life, at least,
Could not have brought the shadow of a change
Across it. Safely the warm years increast
Among us. I have never sought to range
From our small table at earth's general feast,
To higher places: never loved but you,
Dear family of friends, except my art:
Nor any form save those my pencil drew
E'er quivered in the quiet of my heart.

I die a maiden to Madonna true,
And would have so continued. . . .
There, the smart,
The pang, the faintness ! . . .
Ever, as I lie
Here, with the Autumn sunset on my face,
And heavy in my curls (whilst it, and I,
Together, slipping softly from the place
We played in, pensively prepare to die),
A low warm humming simmers in my ears,
— Old Summer afternoons ! faint fragments rise
Out of my broken life . . . at times appears
Madonna-like a moon in mellow skies :
The three Fates with the spindle and the shears :
The Grand Duke Cosmo with the Destinies :
St. Margaret with her dragon : fitful cheers
Along the Via Urbana come and go :
Bologna with her towers ! . . . Then all grows dim,
And shapes itself anew, softly and slow,
To cloistered glooms through which the silver hymn
Eludes the sensitive silence ; whilst below
The southwest window, just one single, slim,
And sleepy sunbeam, powders with waved gold
A lane of gleamy mist along the gloom,
Whereby to find its way, through manifold
Magnificence, to Guido Reni's tomb,
Which, set in steadfast splendor, I behold.
And all the while, I scent the incense fume,
Till dizzy grows the brain, and dark the eye
Beneath the eyelid. When the end is come,
There, by his tomb (our master's) let me lie,
Somewhere, not too far off; beneath the dome
Of our own Lady of the Rosary :
Safe, where old friends will pass; and still near home !

LAST WORDS.

Will, are you sitting and watching there yet ? And I know, by a certain skill
That grows out of utter wakefulness, the night must be far spent, Will :
For, lying awake so many a night, I have learned at last to catch
From the crowing cock, and the clanging clock, and the sound of the beating watch,
A misty sense of the measureless march of Time, as he passes here,
Leaving my life behind him ; and I know that the dawn is near.
But you have been watching three nights, Will, and you looked so wan to-night,
I thought, as I saw you sitting there, in the sad monotonous light
Of the moody night-lamp near you, that I could not choose but close
My lids as fast, and lie as still, as though I lay in a doze :
For, I thought, " He will deem I am dreaming, and then he may steal away,
And sleep a little : and this will be well." And truly, I dreamed, as I lay
Wide awake, but all as quiet, as though, the last office done,
They had streaked me out for the grave, Will, to which they will bear me anon.
Dreamed ; for old things and places came dancing about my brain,
Like ghosts that dance in an empty house : and my thoughts went slipping again
By green back-ways forgotten to a stiller circle of time,
Where violets, faded forever, seemed blowing as once in their prime :
And I fancied that you and I, Will, were boys again as of old,
At dawn on the hill-top together, at eve in the field by the fold ;
Till the thought of this was growing too wildly sweet to be borne,
And I oped my eyes, and turned me round, and there, in the light forlorn,
I find you sitting beside me. But the dawn is at hand, I know.
Sleep a little. I shall not die to-night. You may leave me. Go.

Eh ! is it time for the drink ? must you mix it ? it does me no good.
But thanks, old friend, true friend ! I would live for your sake, if I could.
Ay, there are some good things in life, that fall not away with the rest.
And, of all best things upon earth, I hold that a faithful friend is the best.
For woman, Will, is a thorny flower : it breaks, and we bleed and smart :
The blossom falls at the fairest, and the thorn runs into the heart.
And woman's love is a bitter fruit ; and, however he bite it, or sip,
There 's many a man has lived to curse the taste of that fruit on his lip.
But never was any man yet, as I ween, be he whosoever he may,
That has known what a true friend is, Will, and wished that knowledge away.
You were proud of my promise, faithful despite of my fall,
Sad when the world seemed over sweet, sweet when the world turned gall :
When I cloaked myself in the pride of praise from what God grieved to see,
You saw through the glittering lie of it all, and silently mourned for me :
When the world took back what the world had given, and scorn with praise changed place,
I, from my sackcloth and ashes, looked up, and saw hope glow on your face :
Therefore, fair weather be yours, Will, whether it shines or pours,
And, if I can slip from out of my grave, my spirit will visit yours.

O woman eyes that have smiled and smiled, O woman lips that have kist
The life-blood out of my heart, why thus forever do you persist,
Pressing out of the dark all round, to bewilder my dying hours
With your ghostly sorceries brewed from the breath of your poison-flowers ?
Still, though the idol be broken, I see at their ancient revels,
The riven altar around, come dancing the self-same devils.
Lente currite, lente currite, noctis equi !
Linger a little, O Time, and let me be saved ere I die.
How many a night 'neath her window have I walked in the wind and rain,
Only to look at her shadow fleet over the lighted pane.
Alas ! 't was the shadow that rested, 't was herself that fleeted, you see,
And now I am dying, I know it : — dying, and where is she !
Dancing divinely, perchance, or, over her soft harp strings,
Using the past to give pathos to the little new song that she sings.
Bitter ? I dare not be bitter in the few last hours left to live.
Needing so much forgiveness, God grant me at least to forgive.
There can be no space for the ghost of her face down in the narrow room,
And the mole is blind, and the worm is mute, and there must be rest in the tomb.
And just one failure more or less to a life that seems to be
(Whilst I lie looking upon it, as a bird on the broken tree
She hovers about, ere making wing for a land of lovelier growth,
Brighter blossom, and purer air, somewhere far off in the south,)
Failure, crowning failure, failure from end to end,
Just one more or less, what matter, to the many no grief can mend ?
Not to know vice is virtue, not fate, however men rave :
And, next to this I hold that man to be but a coward and slave
Who bears the plague-spot about him, and, knowing it, shrinks or fears
To brand it out, though the burning knife should hiss in his heart's hot tears.
But I have caught the contagion of a world that I never loved,
Pleased myself with approval of those that I never approved,
Paltered with pleasures that pleased not, and fame where no fame could be,
And how shall I look, do you think, Will, when the angels are looking on me ?
Yet oh ! the confident spirit once mine, to dare and to do !
Take the world into my hand, and shape it, and make it anew :
Gather all men in my purpose, men in their darkness and dearth,
Men in their meanness and misery, made of the dust of the earth,
Mould them afresh, and make out of them Man, with his spirit sublime,

Man, the great heir of Eternity, dragging the conquests of Time!
Therefore I mingled among them, deeming the poet should hold
All natures saved in his own, as the world in the ark was of old;
All natures saved in his own to be types of a nobler race,
When the old world passeth away and the new world taketh his place.
Triple fool in my folly! purblind and impotent worm,
Thinking to move the world, who could not myself stand firm!
Cheat of a worn-out trick, as one that on shipboard roves
Wherever the wind may blow, still deeming the continent moves!
Blowing the frothy bubble of life's brittle purpose away;
Child, ever chasing the morrow, who now cannot ransom a day:
Still I called Fame to lead onward, forgetting she follows behind
Those who know whither they walk through the praise or dispraise of mankind.
All my life (looking back on it) shows like the broken stair
That winds round a ruined tower, and never will lead anywhere.
Friend, lay your hand in my own, and swear to me, when you have seen
My body borne out from the door, ere the grass on my grave shall be green,
You will burn every book I have written. And so perish, one and all,
Each trace of the struggle that failed with the life that I cannot recall.
Dust and ashes, earth's dross, which the mattock may give to the mole!
Something, though stained and defaced, survives, as I trust, with the soul.

Something? . . . Ay, something comes back to me . . . Think! that I might have been . . . what?
Almost, I fancy at times, what I meant to have been, and am not.
Where was the fault? Was it strength fell short? And yet (I can speak of it now!)
How my spirit sung like the resonant nerve of a warrior's battle-bow
When the shaft has leapt from the string, what time, her first bright banner unfurled,
Song aimed her arrowy purpose in me sharp at the heart of the world.
Was it the hand that faltered, unskilled? or was it the eye that deceived?
However I reason it out, there remains a failure time has not retrieved.
I said I would live in all lives that beat, and love in all loves that be:
I would crown me lord of all passions; and the passions were lords of me.
I would compass every circle, I would enter at every door,
In the starry spiral of science, and the labyrinth of lore,
Only to follow the flying foot of love to his last retreat.
Fool! that with man's all-imperfect would circumscribe God's all-complete!
Arrogant error! whereby I starved like the fool in the fable of old,
Whom the gods destroyed by the gift he craved, turning all things to gold.
Be wise: know what to leave unknown. The flowers bloom on the brink,
But black death lurks at the bottom. Help men to enjoy, not to think,
O poet to whom I give place! cull the latest effect, leave the cause.
Few that dive for the pearl of the deep but are crushed in the kraken's jaws.
While the harp of Arion is heard at eve over the glimmering ocean:
He floats in the foam, on the dolphin's back, gliding with gentle motion,
Over the rolling water, under the light of the beaming star,
And the nymphs, half asleep on the surface, sail moving his musical car.
A little knowledge will turn youth gray. And I stood, chill in the sun,
Naming you each of the roses; blest by the beauty of none.
My song had an after-savor of the salt of many tears,
Or it burned with a bitter foretaste of the end as it now appears:
And the world that had paused to listen awhile, because the first notes were gay,
Passed on its way with a sneer and a smile: "Has he nothing fresher to say?
This poet's mind was a weedy flower that presently comes to naught!"
For the world was not so sad but what my song was sadder, it thought.
Comfort me not. For if aught be worse than failure from over-stress

Of a life's prime purpose, it is to sit down content with a little success.
Talk not of genius baffled. Genius is master of man.
Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can.
Blot out my name, that the spirits of Shakespeare and Milton and Burns
Look not down on the praises of fools with a pity my soul yet spurns.
And yet, had I only the trick of an aptitude shrewd of its kind,
I should have lived longer, I think, more merry of heart and of mind.
Surely I knew (who better?) the innermost secret of each
Bird, and beast, and flower. Failed I to give to them speech?
All the pale spirits of storm, that sail down streams of the wind,
Cleaving the thunder-cloud, with wild hair blowing behind;
All the soft seraphs that float in the light of the crimson eve,
When Hesper begins to glitter, and the heavy woodland to heave:
All the white nymphs of the water that dwell 'mid the lilies alone:
And the buskined maids for the love of whom the hoary oak-trees groan;
They came to my call in the forest; they crept to my feet from the river:
They softly looked out of the sky when I sung, and their wings beat with breathless endeavor
The blocks of the broken thunder piling their stormy lattices,
Over the moaning mountain walls, and over the sobbing seas.
So many more reproachful faces around my bed!
Voices moaning about me: "Ah! couldst thou not heed what we said?"
Peace to the past! it skills not now: these thoughts that vex it in vain
Are but the dust of a broken purpose blowing about the brain
Which presently will be tenantless, when the wanton worms carouse,
And the mole builds over my bones his little windowless house.
It is growing darker and stranger, Will, and colder, — dark and cold,
Dark and cold! Is the lamp gone out? Give me thy hand to hold.
No: 't is life's brief candle burning down. Tears? tears, Will! Why,
This which we call dying is only ceasing to die.
It is but the giving over a game all lose. Fear life, not death.
The hard thing was to live, Will. To whatever bourn this breath
Is going, the way is easy now. With flowers and music, life,
Like a pagan sacrifice, leads us along to this dark High Priest with the knife.
I have been too peevish at mere mischance. For whether we build it, friend,
Of brick or jasper, life's large base dwindles into this point at the end,
A kind of nothing! Who knows whether 't is fittest to weep or laugh
At those thin curtains the spider spins o'er each dusty epitaph?
I talk wildly. But this I know, that not even the best and first,
When all is done, can claim by desert what even to the last and worst
Of us weak workmen, God from the depth of his infinite mercy giveth.
These bones shall rest in peace, for I know that my Redeemer liveth.
Doubtful images come and go; and I seem to be passing them by.
Bubbles these be of the mind, which show that the stream is hurrying nigh
To the home of waters. Already I feel, in a sort of still sweet awe,
The great main current of all that I am beginning to draw and draw
Into perfect peace. I attain at last! Life 's a long, long reaching out
Of the soul to something beyond her. Now comes the end of all doubt.
The vanishing point in the picture! I have uttered weak words to-night,
And foolish. A thousand failures, what are these in the sight
Of the One All-Perfect who, whether man fails in his work, or succeeds,
Builds surely, solemnly up from our broken days and deeds
The infinite purpose of time. We are but day-laborers all,
Early or late, or first or last at the gate in the vineyard wall.
Lord! if, in love, though fainting oft, I have tended thy gracious Vine,
O, quench the thirst on these dying lips, Thou who pourest the wine!
Hush! I am in the way to study a long, long silence now.

I know at last what I cannot tell : I see what I may not show.
Pray awhile for my soul. Then sleep. There is nothing in this to fear.
I shall sleep into death. Night sleeps. The hoarse wolf howls not near,
No dull owl beats the casement, and no rough-bearded star
Stares on my mild departure from yon dark window bar.
Nature takes no notice of those that are coming or going.
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